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The Geopolitical Significance of the Bering Strait Region in the 21st Century

Diplomová práce

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Abstrakt

S rostoucím geopolitickým významem asijsko-pacifického regionu a Arktidy, zásadním způsobem roste i význam Beringovy úžiny jako strategického geopolitického území a dopravního uzlu ve 21. století. To je zapříčiněno změnou klimatu, jež má za následek tání mořského ledu v Arktidě a její celkové oteplování, čímž danou oblast otevírá novým ekonomickým možnostem. Těmi jsou zejména rostoucí dostupnost nerostných zdrojů v Severním ledovém oceánu a zpřístupňování nových námořních tras. To vše má zásadní dopad na Beringovu úžinu, jakožto jediný koridor spojující tichomořskou a arktickou oblast. Zároveň však může mít zvýšená dopravní aktivita v oblasti a zapojení více akterů neblahý vliv na zdejší ekosystém a životy původních obyvatel. Tato diplomová práce zkoumá limity, výzvy i nástrahy, kterým tento dopravni koridor v dnešní době čelí. Dále se zabývá jakým způsobem bude ve 21. století růst geopolitický význam oblasti Beringovy úžiny vzhledem k její unikátní strategické poloze, která ji předurčuje stát se důležitou dopravní křižovatkou a jaké to bude mít dopady na zdejší prostředí. I když i zájmy dalších aktérů v oblasti jsou zkoumány, práce se zabývá tématem převážně z pohledu USA. Důraz je kladen především na roli Spojených států, jejich přístup k Beringové úžině, a tím na americkou vládní politiku v této oblasti. Práce dochází k závěru, že strategický význam Beringovy úžiny díky oteplování Arktidy již roste a bude růst i nádale, avšak bude ještě několik desetiletí trvat než dosáhne svého vrcholu. Spojené státy reflektují tuto situaci tím, že začaly věnovat danému regionu větší pozornost v rámci své vládní arktické politiky.

Abstract

As Arctic warms twice as fast as the rest of the world and the polar ice-cap melts, the strategic importance and geopolitical significance of the Bering Strait as the only maritime gateway between the world‘s fastest-developing and dynamic regions, the Asia Pacific and the Arctic region, will steadily grow. The climate change triggered the reduction of the Arctic ice-cap, which results in increased maritime traffic activity as new shipping routes are becoming more viable and mineral resources more accessible. This has a tremendous impact on the region as it opens it to economic development but at the same time it puts strain on its fragile environment. The goal of the paper is to affirm that the geopolitical significance of the Bering Strait is increasing and will increase in the near future. The work examines the causes of the Bering Strait region’s rise, its characteristics, challenges and opportunities together with the assessment of major regional actors‘ interests and approaches towards the region. Next, paper focuses The emphasis is put especially on the role of the United States and on their attitude toward the Bering Strait region. It therefore pays attention namely on the US policy and goals in the region, and on the implications the Strait’s growing global importance has for the United States. The work comes to the conclusion that the Bering Strait region‘s geopolitical significance is rising due to climate change and shrinkage of the ice, however, it will take a few decades until it reaches its peak. The United States has started to reflect the situation by paying more attention toward the area in its official national Arctic policy and by playing a more active role in the region.

Klíčová slova

Beringova úžina, Spojené státy americké, geopolitika, mezinárodní spolupráce, Arktida, ochrana životního prostředí, námořní doprava, Aljaška

Keywords

Bering Strait, United States of America, geopolitics, international cooperation, Arctic, environmetal protection, maritime traffic, Alaska

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Čestné prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto seminární práci zpracovala samostatně a veškeré prameny a literaturu uvádím v seznamu. Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna pro studijní a výzkumné účely.

V Praze dne…….

……

podpis

Poděkování

Na tomto místě bych ráda poděkovala své vedoucí práce Mgr. Janě Sehnálkové za podnětné komentáře, konzultace a zejména za trpělivost.

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V čem se oproti původními zadání změnil cíl práce?

S rostoucím geopolitickým významem asijsko-pacifického regionu a Arktidy zásadním způsobem roste i význam Beringovy úžiny jako strategického geopolitického území a dopravního uzlu ve 21. století. Do tohoto regionu stále intenzivněji vstupují státní i nadstátní aktéři zainteresovaní v oblasti. Mezi ně patří především Spojené státy a Ruská federace, ale i mezinárodní organizace a další instituce, které se v regionu snaží zajistit ochranu zdejšího ekosystému, ale i maximalizovat své potřeby a zisky. Vzhledem k místním klimatickým podmínkám a odlehlosti regionu je to prozatím mezinárodní spolupráce, ne konflikt, které určují a nadále budou určovat směr a vývoj oblasti.

Pracovat budu s několika geopolitickými teoriemi, s jejichž pomocí se pokusím demonstrovat, proč se Beringova úžina stává geopoliticky významným strategickým místem, a zkoumat, zda či proč by měli jednotliví aktéři tuto skutečnost reflektovat. Dále budu analyzovat možnosti a limity mezinárodní spolupráce v dané oblasti z pohledu střetu kooperativních a konfliktních teorií, protože do oblasti vstupují nejen státy, ale i mezinárodní organizace a další instituce. Zejména se budu věnovat přístupu a zájmům USA v daném regionu, a tomu jak se k otázce zvyšeného zájmu o oblast Berinogvy úžiny staví.

Jaké změny nastaly v časovém, teritoriálním a věcném vymezení tématu?

Časově se práce bude zabývat primárně obdobím od roku 2000, tedy počátkem 21. století. Důraz bude kladen zejména na období od roku 2008, tedy na administrativy aktérů majících v oblasti největší zájmy, konkrétně prezidentů Obamy a Putina. Analyzovány tak budou události od počátku nového století, zejména pak posledních pěti let.

Z teritoriálního hlediska se práce věnuje území kolem Beringovy úžiny, která se nazývá Beringia, tedy primárně americkému státu Aljaška a ruskému Dálnému východu. Tato oblast ale zasahuje i do Kanady, a to do teritoria Yukon a Britská Kolumbie. Pro povahu práce bude také zásadní oblast Arktidy, která se dotýká regionu Beringie severně od Beringovy úžiny, tedy oblast Čukotského, Východosibiřského a Beaufortova moře a samozřejmě i vod Beringova moře a

Severního Tichého oceánu, které se rozkládají jižně od průlivu. Vzhledem k zájmům dalších akterů v oblasti budou do práce vstupovat i jiné státní celky a mezinárodní organizace.

Jak se proměnila struktura práce (vyjádřete stručným obsahem)?
Úvod
1. Detailní představení regionu a jeho vymezení, krátký historický, kulturní a socioekonomický exkurz do oblasti
2. Problémy a fenomény, kterým dnes oblast dnes čelí (energetika, ekologie, infrastruktura, doprava)
3. Zájmy a zapojení jednotlivých států v oblasti
(USA, Rusko, Čína, Kanada, Arktická Rada a další aktéři vstupující do regionu) zde bude kladen především důraz na politiku USA v dané oblasti.
Závěr

Jakým vývojem prošla metodologická koncepce práce?
Z metodologického hlediska půjde o jedinečnou případovou studii, která bude provedena především na základě interpretace primárních, ale i sekundárních zrojů.
Protože na toto téma nevznikla prakticka žádná ucelená publikace, čerpat budu především z primárních zdrojů, novinových zpráv, memorand a odborných článků či studií. Důležitým zdrojem budou oficiální stránky jednotlivých organizací, projektů a programů týkajících se dané oblasti (zejména jejich výroční zprávy či souhrnné dokumenty a závěrečné zprávy z konferencí).

Které nové prameny a sekundární literatura byly zpracovány a jak tato skutečnost ovlivnila celek práce?
Jedním ze zásadních zdrojů pro pochopení celého regionu z hlediska infrastrukury, námořních tras a environmentálních rizik je rozsáhlá studie "Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment Report," vyadaná v roce 2009 Arktickou radou. Tato zpráva přispěla k lepšímu pochopení a hlubšímu porozumění zkoumaných fenoménů, problémů a rizik, kterým Beringova úžina čelí.
Dalšími důležitými zdroji jsou vládní publikace týkající se mezinárodnímo parku Beringia, jako "Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation Symbolically Linking National Parks in the Bering Strait Region" vydané vládou USA a Ruské federace v říjnu 2013 či dokument vydaný americkou Správou národních parků (National Park Service) "Bridge of Friendship: A Progress Report on the Establishment of Beringia National Park," ve které jsou představeny cíle, mise a důvody daného projektu sesterského národního parku. Ukazují tak, že se jedná o dlouhodobý projekt a snahu USA a Ruska spolupracovat v této oblasti, a to již od konce 80. let dvacátého století. Tím popporuje moji tezi, že spolupráce zde převažuje nad konflikty.
Díky zahraničnímu pobytu na University of Washington v Seattlu, který jsem absolvovala v zimním semestru 2013, jsem získala další cenné a užitečné zdroje, dokumenty a zákony z oddělení vládních publikací místní univerzitní knihovny.

Charakterizujte základní proměny práce v době od zadání projektu do odevzdání tezí a pokuste se vyhodnotit, jaký pokrok na práci jste během semestru zaznamenali (v bodech):
- doba od zadání projektu byla věnována získávání a studia zdrojů a následným vymezováním specifičtějších cílů práce
- v zimním semestru 2013/2014 jsem absolvovala studjní pobyt na University of Washington v Seattlu, kde jsem získala další materiály - jak primární tak

sekundární zdroje z univerzitní knihovny a databází, ke kterým jsem díky ní měla přístup - byly prováděny konzultace s různými vyučujícími na Katedře amerických studií FSV UK, na University of Washigton, i např. s ředitelem Russian-American Pacific Partnership v Seattlu Derekem Norbergem. Došlo k navázání kontaktů s dalšími osobami v akademické sféře či v politickém, které se zabývají danou oblastí - snaha hledat stáže či granty, aby bylo možné se do oblasti vydat		
Podpis studenta a datum:		
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Obsah

Introduction

With the end of the Cold war, the old geopolitical world order of two competing superpowers ceased to exist. The United States emerged as the world hegemon in the early nineties, however, other states were on the rise economically with China taking the lead. The world started facing new security challenges and threats completely different from the bipolar worldview during the Cold war when a threat of a nuclear strike was a day-to-day reality. Environmental problems, terrorism, rapid advancement of technology and rising countries of the developing world, have shifted world's attention from Europe to other stages - Middle East, the Asia-Pacific and the Arctic - in particular. With the end of the Cold war, the old geopolitical world order of two competing superpowers ceased to exist. The United States emerged as the world hegemon in the early nineties, however, other states were on the rise economically with China taking the lead. The world started facing new security challenges and threats completely different from the bipolar worldview during the Cold war when a threat of a nuclear strike was a day-to-day reality. Environmental problems, terrorism, rapid advancement of technology and rising countries of the developing world, have shifted world's attention from Europe to other stages - Middle East, the Asia-Pacific and the Arctic - in particular.

Although, recent events proved Europe and Middle East are still politically unstable regions still demanding Western powers' involvement, the world is turning to the economically, politically and geopolitically rising Asia-Pacific region as the future global center. Many even declared the twenty-first century as a "Pacific" century. This view has been strengthened after Barack Obama was elected President in 2008. His administration announced a reorientation of the US foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific with the pivot to Asia as the cornerstone of its new strategy. On the other hand, Russia has always been regarded predominantly as a European power, with all its major cities and industry based in its European part. However, Moscow has also shifted its attention towards the Asia-Pacific and its markets. On the other hand, Asian countries aspire to obtain Russian natural resources - oil and gas - which made Russia to start rebuilding and investing in its underdeveloped eastern regions.

However, all states are in need for oil and gas as they strive to ensure their energy security, especially in a time of a volatile and tense situation in the Middle East. Therefore, many look up North, to the Arctic as a promising region. According to the US Geological Survey estimates, the Arctic holds approximately 13% of global undiscovered oil reserves,

30% of natural gas reserves and 20 % natural gas liquids.[1] As the Arctic warms and sea-ice cap melts, the region is opening to drilling possibilities and new transportation routes which could serve as major maritime sea lanes used for transportation of various goods but also oil and gas to Asian markets in the future.

The Bering Strait, the only watery corridor linking the booming Asia-Pacific region and the changing Arctic holds a unique and strategic place in the Northern region due to its geographic location and physical characteristics. Being on the frontline of these two aspiring geopolitical areas and two major powers, the United States and the Russian Federation, the Bering Strait as natural bottleneck will be of great geostrategic significance in the twenty-first century. Holding a potential of becoming a major transportation junction and a place of significant economic activity, it is also a biologically and environmentally sensitive area. The Bering Strait region (BRS) is a dynamic area exposed to profound, sudden and quick changes as a consequence of climate change and reduction of sea ice that can threaten the fragile ecosystem and large native populations as increased traffic, human and technological presence is likely to occur. Therefore, interests of various groups, nations and institutions might collide in the area as some will seek to open it for development and marine traffic while others strive to "conserve" it. On that account, such an approach should be adopted that would balance interest of all parties involved as securing this point might become focal in the very near future.

Moreover, an area where the United States and the Russia meet each other offers another level of the region's complex relations. Being far from their respective political and economic centers the way how the region is and will be managed, governed and approached can determine whether the region will thrive and fulfill its potential. The region can become a place for revival of American-Russian relations if they can find common grounds for joint cooperation. Apart from the traffic management of the watery passage and its adjacent seas, shared history and heritage through native peoples, environmental protection connected to climate change and scientific research of the region being constitute areas eligible for cooperative work.

[1] "90 Billion Barrels of Oil and 1,670 Trillion Cubic Feet of Natural Gas Assessed in the Arctic," US Geological

Thesis

As climate warms in the Arctic twice as fast as the rest of the world[2] and the polar ice-cap melts, the strategic importance and geopolitical significance of the Bering Strait as the only maritime gateway between the world's fastest-developing and dynamic regions, the Asia Pacific and the Arctic region will steadily grow. The goal of the thesis is to affirm that the geopolitical significance of the Bering Strait is increasing and will increase in the near future due to the global warming as it triggered all the changes which have a tremendous impact on the region. The work examines the causes of the Bering Strait region's rise, its characteristics, challenges and opportunities together with the assessment of major regional actors and their interests in the region.

However, the thesis is analyzed from the US standpoint mainly as the US has a direct access to the Bering Strait coastline. In doing so, it can maintain, control, influence and decide on the region to a great extent. It is an area where the Unites States can assert its rights and advance their own interests when regarding the region's potential. Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War the official US policy rather neglected the Arctic and the Bering Strait area. For a long time the United States acted as a reluctant Arctic player. This has begun to change as the US started realizing that lagging behind Canada, Norway, and Russia especially could have far-reaching consequences in the future.[3] As one of two nations bordering on the Bering Strait, the United States has a huge opportunity at hand to become a fully engaged member in the region and start to define the future course of its region and its politics. The US has a huge potential to acquire a leading role in the Bering Strait region. Therefore, even though interests and actions of other actors involved in the Strait are assessed in the study, the paper focuses on the US policy and goals in the region, and on the implications the Strait's growing global importance has for the United States predominantly.

Geopolitical concepts and the Bering Strait

The geopolitical thinking of the 21st century transformed from its roots of the geopolitics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that centered on great power rivalry

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Survey, accessed July 20, 2015, http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1980#.VbpJyfntmko.

[2] "Arctic Report Card: Update for 2014," National Oceanic and Athmospheric Administration, accessed July 20, 2015, http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/reportcard/.

[3] Dag Harald Claes and Øyvind Østerud, Øistein Harsem, **"**The New Geopolitics of the High North,**"** Paper presented at the 51st ISA Convention in New Orleans, Panel: Geopolitics of the Arctic Region I - The Security Challenges, February 18, 2010, accessed Januray 15, 2015, 3-13, http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/images/stories/attachments/claes.pdf.

based on social Darwinism principles and later on bipolar world system to multipolar realities of the current world.[4] As Caitlyn L. Antrim claims the geopolitical thinking of the twenty-first century builds upon the twentieth century's geopolitics but is a lot different too.[5]

As a part of the Arctic[6] with which it shares many common features, the geopolitical concept for the Bering Strait region stems from the Arctic geopolitical thinking. As Professor Østerud noted "the centre of gravity – in geopolitical terms – is moving towards the North and the East."[7] According to Østerud, the rising role of China, Russia's aggressiveness and the swift rise of the ISIS implies that it is again rather the original geopolitical reasoning, the play of great powers what is now in spotlight, in which favor the pendulum is been moving.[8]

On the other hand, Michael Mayer claims that although the geopolitical centre of gravity is moving North and East according to the Arctic states, "… the rest of the world increasingly focuses south and east."[9] Mayer explains that two contrasting ideas, globalization and geopolitics have taken over the world order ruling today after the Cold War ended but they rather complement not oppose each other as the world have shifted from national politics and bipolarity to international cooperation and multilateralism. There, is not one or two huge geopolitical blocs in the world, but many smaller geostrategic regions varying in size that are becoming more and more interconnected and interdependent as they are integrated in global trade network. And globalization makes it harder for conflict to break out between nations. Mayer further adds that "in many of today's bilateral strategic relationships, non-state globalisation processes, state corporations and national economic policies interact in complex ways. States both shape

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[4] "What is "geopolitics"?" Geopolitics in the High North, accessed May 13, 2015, http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45:article2&catid=44&showall=&limitstart=

[5] Caytlin L. Antrim, "THE NEXT GEOGRAPHICAL PIVOT: The Russian Arctic," *Naval War College Review* 63, 2010, 21; Dmitry Gorenburg, "How to understand Russia's Arctic strategy," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2014, accessed July 10, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/12/how-to-understand-russias-arcticstrategy/.

[6] The boundaries of the Arctic can be decided by several factors, by the boundary of the Arctic Circle, the northern frontier of forests, by direct access of involved states to the Arctic Ocean or by isotherm reaching not over 10°C in July. Taking the last variable the Bering Strait is considered as being part of the Arctic.

[7] Øyvind Østerud, "The Reemergence of Geopolitics," Geopolitics in the High North, http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45:article2&catid=44&showall=&limitstart=1.

[8] Østerud, "The Reemergence of Geopolitics."

[9] Michael Mayer, "In Search of Conceptual Clarity," Geopolitics in the High North, http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45:article2&catid=44&showall=&limitstart=2,

the relationships through these processes and are also shaped by them."[10] He argues that contemporary geopolitical thinking is influenced by processes of globalization which do not only affect state-to-state relations but to an even greater extent influence local and regional relationships. By assessing all these factors and relations a nation can draw its policy and geopolitical strategy towards other states.

The Bering Strait and the Artic remains to be a strategic region for national security matters and military issues of Arctic countries, however, as the geopolitical significance of the Arctic waned in the early nineties environmental issues, international cooperation, economic development and scientific research replaced the hard-line military issues in the 1990s. Since the early twenty-first century international, intergovernmental and regional cooperation took over military rivalry as "the defining feature of circumpolar geopolitics."[11] Which is also the case of the Bering Strait region, as I will argue in the thesis.

According to Professor Lassi Heininen, an expert on the Northern geopolitics and security, three topics determines the geopolitics and international cooperation in the Arctic and the Bering Strait region today.[12] The first is the revival of intensified intra-regional cooperation amongst indigenous peoples, local governments and non-governmental organizations and institutions. As new international entities and players entered the arena of regional policy-making, it influenced the regional dynamics positively and made the cross-border collaboration commonplace. This led to the shift of geopolitics "from state domination and militarization towards a more human orientation."[13]

The second topic is region-building which have been under the way in the region since conflict and military security matters have been diminishing as new pressing issues such as environmental problems and human development. Pursued by national and governmental initiatives, region-building activities strive to promote stability and alleviate regional discrepancies and tensions, sometimes with the help of local and grassroots organizations, groups and institutions.[14] Heininen considers the region-building to be one of the key aspects transforming the geopolitical approach to the Arctic region as it

[10] Michael Mayer, "In Search of Conceptual Clarity."
[11] Heininen, "Circumpolar International Relations and Geopolitics," 218.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid
[14] Ibid.

emphasizes the regional stability and environmental security in contrast to military significance which drove the geopolitics of the region before.[15]

The last topic centers on the growing integration of the Arctic into the global economic network as its strategic role in "globalized world economy" and trade increases and the military-driven significance of the region wanes. However, nations are still key players in the integration. Apart from economy and environment, he highlights the role of security policy within the broader concept of security in the circumpolar North.[16]

In the thesis, geopolitics understands the interplay of various state and non-state actors trying to secure their individual and collective interests through international cooperation mainly as they are part of the globalized world. Climate change has been a crucial factor that has helped to alter geopolitical thinking towards the Arctic[17] as new challenges stemming from ice shrinkage emerged. The Bering Strait, as a natural bottleneck has a huge strategic significance in terms of environmental, energy and military security.[18] Being a gateway to the Arctic/the Asia-Pacific, its natural resources, economic possibilities, prospects for global trade and industrial development make it also economically strategic area for states outside the region which want to use its potential as well. To handle these challenges and issues, region-building and international cooperation are the key factors that will define the realities of the Bering Strait region, although national interests will still play a role as well.

Structure of the thesis

The work is divided into three sections. The first chapter provides a background overview of the Bering Strait region's physical conditions, natural characteristics, history and native peoples. Understanding the region's history, geographic characteristics, cultural and socioeconomic aspects is essential to fully comprehend the complexities and issues the area faces today.

Next, the second chapter outlines the challenges and opportunities impacting and transforming the Bering Strait area today. First, the climate change and its effect on the

[15] Ibid. 218, 222
[16] Ibid.
[17] Dag Harald Claes, Øyvind Østerud, Øistein Harsem, "The New Geopolitics of the High North," Paper presented at the 51st ISA Convention in New Orleans, Panel: Geopolitics of the Arctic Region I - The Security Challenges, February 18, 2010, accessed Januray 15, 2015, 3-13, http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/images/stories/attachments/claes.pdf.
[18] Lassi Heininen, "Circumpolar International Relations and Geopolitics," Arctic Human Development Report, http://svs.is/images/pdf_files/ahdr/English_version/AHDR_chp_12.pdf, 207-225.

area, environment, and its people is analyzed as regional opportunities and challenges stem. Second, economic prospects and industrial development is examined. Last, the transportation, maritime infrastructure, ports and increasing vessel activity with its limits and possibilities in the corridor are examined.

In the third chapter, the work analyses interests and policies of regional powers and also the Arctic Council which is the main international institution in the High North. However, the major part of this section is dedicated to the Unites States, its agenda and interests. Therefore, the emphasis is put on the role of the United States when analyzing its core documents and strategies dealing with the Bering Strait area.

1. The Bering Strait area: Regional Overview

Spanning across two continents and including two countries, the Russian Federation and the United States, the Bering Strait region encompasses a vast territory that belongs geologically to the North-American Plateau.[19] Despite being separated by the Strait, both Russian and American side of the region share many similar characteristics ranging from climate, ecosystem, inhabitants, to resources and economies. People, inhabiting the area around the Strait for more than 10,000 years, have used the same ways to hunt and live in the region's harsh conditions for millennia. Therefore, local people on both sides have to deal with the same challenges and prospects occurring on economic, environmental and socio-cultural level. And except for a historically short period of the Cold War, the small but dynamic region has never been truly separated.

As the region is located at the extreme points of northern hemisphere far from main political and economic centers of both countries, the Bering Strait area has not been regarded as a region of any crucial significance neither by public nor by many experts and high officials since the end of the Cold War. However, the Strait is a very important corridor between the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, connecting two geopolitical areas on the rise, the High North and the Asia-Pacific. Being described as an "Arctic bottleneck,"[20] the narrow strait poses an immense potential because of the water flows and currents exchanging between both Oceans, migration ways for marine animals, shipping routes

[19] Roger M. Downs et al., eds., *National Geographic: Almanach Geografie* (Praha: Sanoma Magazines, 2006), 108.

[20] Andrew Hartsig, Ivy Fredrickson, Carmen Yeung and Stan Senner, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region from Increased Vessel Traffic," *Ocean & Coastal Law Journal* 18 (2012): 35, 40.

passing via the corridor and oil and gas reserves within its maritime zone. At the same time, the region is highly prone to any changes linked to not only commercial opportunities, security challenges but also environmental threats happening in the area in both positive and negative ways due to the ice reduction and climate change.

Furthermore, cultural heritage, problems local people face today and a long common history shared by native communities spread across the Strait together with socio-economic ties helped to create a distinctive environment that is naturally interconnected. The watery channel is not considered a barrier, but rather a unifying element of the region determining its characteristics. Taking into account the long-term period of mutual cooperation conflict which has only occasionally been interrupted by conflict (usually due to an intervention of ruling authorities of its respective states), the Bering Strait region is a unique and dynamic territory within the Arctic boundaries.

1.1 Geography and environment

As aforementioned, the Bering Strait and the landmass adjacent to it encompasses just a very tiny part of the extensive geopolitical area known as the Arctic, the corridor's boundaries being delimited between 63° to 67° north latitudes.[21] Located between the northern Bering Sea to the South and the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas to the North, it does not only separate North Pacific and Arctic Oceans, but the United States and the Russian Federation, and North American and Eurasian continents as well. At this point the two countries almost touch themselves, this way creating a zone of interaction, cooperation and confrontation ever since.

Nature and physical appearance are very similar, therefore same natural conditions are also present as well as similar raw materials and sources of livelihood. Due to the natural occurrence of the same commodities as oil, gas and marine resources in both areas, their economy is based on similar factors. From a historical perspective, they share a common experience of "conquest," as the Russian Far East and the US West Coast became favorite destinations of both nations' territorial expansionist aims. On top of that, both areas are far away from the political, economic and financial centers of their respective countries and the least populated.

[21] "Bering Strait Region Case Study," Institute of the North, accessed October 26, 2014, http://www.institutenorth.org/assets/images/uploads/files/5.5-Bering-Strait-Region-Case-Study.pdf, 3.

For the purposes of the thesis the area alongside the coast of both Russian and Alaskan side of the Strait is of the primary concern, however, the vast territory which stretches from the Lena River in the Russian Far East to the Mackenzie River in Canada is widely known as Beringia.[22] It was a Swedish botanist Eric Hultén who first used the term in his book on Arctic paleobotany *Outline of the History of Arctic and Boreal Biota during the Quaternary Period* published in 1937.[23] Historians, anthropologists and other scientists use the term particularly when describing the vast territory of the once dry land linking both continents. A renowned scholar and an Arctic specialist John R. Bockstoce refers to the Bering Strait region as an area between the Kolyma River and the Mackenzie River.[24] According to his concept, the area also encompasses, apart from the landmass, maritime territories north to 72° latitude and down south to the southern tip of the Kamchatka peninsula and the Aleutian archipelago which creates a natural border of the region.[25] The whole region is thus bordered by natural barriers, two massive rivers in the East and West, the Aleutian archipelago in the South, and frozen Arctic Ocean in the North which create a natural protection of the area.

Source: Shared Beringian Heritage Program

[22] "What is Beringia," Shared Beringian Heritage Program, National Park Serivce, U. S. Department of the Interior, accessed October 25, 2014, http://www.nps.gov/akso/beringia/beringia/index.cfm.
[23] E. James Dixon, *Arrows and Atl Atls: A Guide to the Archeology of Beringia* Anchorage: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2013, 19-20.
[24] John R. Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North: The Contest among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Starit Fur and Trade*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xvi.
[25] "What is Beringia," Shared Beringian Heritage Program.

The Strait itself is a shallow channel, its depth usually ranging from thirty to fifty meters (max. 200 feet).[26] At the narrowest point, between Cape Dezhnev, Chukotka and Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska, the Strait is approximately 85 km (55 miles) wide.[27] Unlike broader passages linking the Atlantic and the Arctic Oceans, the Bering Strait is the only corridor between the Pacific and the Arctic territories. Apart from being shallow and narrow, the Strait is dotted with several islands of a distinct size, United States' St. Lawrence Island at the mouth of the channel being the largest. The Anadyr Strait between the St. Lawrence Island and Chukotka constitutes an important part of the Bering Strait and is 70 km wide at the narrowest point bringing the Island closer to the Russian coast than to the Unites States.[28] With Diomedes Isles located right in the middle of the Strait, these three islands are the most significant in the corridor. Not only because they have long supported native populations, but they also divide the Strait into additional channels.

The actual border between Russia and the US is in a reality much closer, both countries being less than 4 kilometers apart for the Big Diomede Island (called in Russia Ratmanova Island) being a part of Chukotka and the Little Diomede Island belonging to Alaska.[29] Moreover, the international dateline cuts through Diomedes Islands as well as in the 1867 delineated Convention line which divides the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of both countries too.[30]

As a gateway to the Arctic, the conditions in the region are rough all-year round due to the northern climate. Harsh weather conditions and enormous differences in temperatures and daylight throughout the year impact the region and determine its character heavily. The Strait is frozen from mid-December to mid-June, while foggy weather with strong winds characterizes the summer months.[31] Covered with sea ice for half a year, the scope of marine traffic activity, and the breeding and growing season are limited to a short summer period. Ice conditions vary throughout a year ranging from a

[26] "Bering Strait Region Case Study," Institute of the North, accessed October 26, 2014, http://www.institutenorth.org/assets/images/uploads/files/5.5-Bering-Strait-Region-Case-Study.pdf, 3.
[27] "Arctic Marine Shipping Assesment," 18.
[28] Hillmer-Pegram, K., and M. D. Robards. "Relevance of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area to the Bering Strait Region: a Policy
Analysis Using Resilience-Based Governance Principles," Ecology and Society 20 (1) (2015), 2.
[29] "Bering Strait Region Case Study," 1-3.
[30] J. Clement Kinney et al., "On the Flow Through Bering Strait: A Synthesis of Model Results and Observations," *The Pacific Arctic Region Ecosystem Status and Trends in a Rapidly Changing Environment*, ed., Jacqueline M. Grebmeier and Wieslaw Maslowski (Dodrecht: Springer, 2014), 168; "Bering Strait Region Case Study," 1-3.
[31] USCG Arctic Strategy, 11, Accessed November 24, 2014,
http://www.uscg.mil/seniorleadership/DOCS/CG_Arctic_Strategy.pdf

rather solid and thick ice cap during the winter to flowing ice and ice blocks during the summer and the fall which is caused by strong winds and ocean currents.[32]

The Bering Strait also functions as a corridor for ocean currents enabling them to enter different environments. In the Chirikov Basin, at the mouth of the Strait above the St. Lawrence Island, three major currents merge and then flow via the Strait to the north bringing warmer, low-salinity waters and nutrients into Hope Basin[33] and the Arctic Ocean.[34] There they create a productive biological habitat for native marine flora and fauna. Moreover, the Bering Strait throughflow does not only influence the seas in its nearest proximity, but the Arctic and even World Oceans too. The nutrient-rich Pacific waters flowing northward through its shallow topography "make the wider Bering Strait region a global hot spot in terms of production, comparable to upwelling systems."[35]

The throughflow of nutrients and Pacific waters also provides up to 40% of freshwater and helps to melt the ice in the summer in the Arctic Ocean. In addition, it contributes to the overall stability of the global freshwater cycle and it likely influence the Atlantic overturning circulation.[36]

Next, the Bering Strait region belongs to the most productive marine areas and significant biological sites in the world. Marine mammals also make use of the Strait as a corridor that brings them to their breeding and feasting locations north of the Strait during the summer months.[37] As it is the only gateway from the Pacific area to the Arctic, the significance of the channel from a biological view is immense, several species' of their entire world's populations – pacific walrus, bowhead whale, beluga whales – pass the corridor twice a year.[38] The area is also crucial to many species of seabirds that come here every year to nest. In addition, it is recognized as one of pivotal habitats for populations of polar bears, one tenth of their population being located in and around the Chukchi Sea.[39]

[32] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck," 38.
[33] Located in the Southern Chukchi Sea.
[34] Kinney, "On the Flow Through Bering Strait;" Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck," 38-42.
[35] Large Marine Ecosystemss (LMEs) of the Arctic Area: Revision of the Arctic Map, Protection of the Arctic Enivronment, Arctic Council, accessed April 29, 2015, http://www.pame.is/index.php/projects/ecosystem-approach/Finna -large-marine-ecosystems-lme-s, 14.
[36] "Bering Strait: Pacific Gateway to the Arctic," Polar Science Institute, University of Washington, accessed April 29, 2015, http://psc.apl.washington.edu/HLD/Bstrait/bstrait.html.
[37] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region,",36, 39.
[38] K. Hillmer-Pegram and M. D. Robards. "Relevance of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area to the Bering Strait Region: a Policy Analysis Using Resilience-Based Governance Principles," Ecology and Society 20 (1) (2015), 2.
[39] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region, 39.

On the other side, the Bering Sea south of the Strait belongs to the most productive fishing zones in the world.[40]

For all the aforementioned reasons, the biological and ecological importance of the region has been recognized by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) which delineated three ecologically sensitive areas in the Bering Strait region that are highly vulnerable to the increased maritime vessel and economic activity.[41]

1.2 Historical background

Beringia has always been a place where cultures have collided. However, its importance has differed significantly throughout the time. According to theories widely accepted both by academia and public, first people[42] came to American continents via the Bering Strait from Asia through Siberia. The Bering Land Bridge theory argues that during the Pleistocene Ice Age, the area around the Strait was one solid continuous landmass covered by two enormous glaciers which spread all over the continents of America, Asia and Europe that held much more water than today.[43] As a consequence, the oceans' levels decreased for more than 120 meters at that time allowing a huge land bridge between Asia and America to emerge and thus connect both continents.

However, it was not a narrow strip of land but a huge frozen land belt stretching 620 miles from south to north.[44] This enabled a huge migration of Asiatic population to North and South Americas because most of the land bridge area was grassier than today and above all ice-free. According to archeologists, first people came to the Americas approximately 14,000 years ago following herds of wild animals.[45] This theory proves that American continents had been inhabited by peoples long before the arrival of first Europeans. Native mythology on both sides of the Bering Strait region supports the notion of native communities' common background which has been reinforced historically by strong intertribal connections and ties. The symbol of Raven as one of the highest and most prominent figures in their spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions implies that native

[40] "Arctic Sea Ice Decline: Projected Changes in Timing and Extent of Sea Ice in the Bering and Chukchi Seas," US Geological Survey, accessed May, 12, 2015, 2 http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2010/1176/pdf/ofr20101176.pdf.
[41] K. Hillmer-Pegram, "Relevance of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area," 2.
[42] The first inhabitants of Americas, indigenous people, Native Americans.
[43] E. James Dixon, *Arrows and Atl Atls: A Guide to the Archeology of Beringia*, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2013, 19-20.
[44] Dixon, *Arrows and Atl Atls,* 20.

populations scattered alongside the region's coastlines have same origins which have been fostered by active cooperation and trade ties for a very long time.[46] It was due to those interactions since the first people flooded the region and crossed the land bridge that the area is called a human crossroads of continents.[47]

Yet, it was not until several centuries ago that other people who were not native to the region became aware of the area which many have called the last frontier.[48] The first non-native person who discovered the Strait was the Russian Cossack Semyon Dezhnev. In 1649 he sailed around the easternmost tip of Eurasian Continent from the North and anchored at the mouth of the Anadyr River to the Bering Sea where he laid foundations to the Anadyr fort.[49] His endeavor was the first to prove there is no land connection between Siberia and North America.[50] Due to the exploration of the vast territory east of the Ural Mountains inhabited mainly by indigenous peoples, the Russian expansion of Siberia that began by conquering the Tatar khanate of Kazan in 1552, was finally accomplished.[51] Unfortunately, Dezhnev's record of his journey disappeared in the archives of Yakutsk and was not re-discovered earlier than almost ninety years later. [52]

Therefore, it was not until more than eighty years later when a Dane Vitus Bering, after whom the Strait is called, reached its waters in 1728 when passing through the Strait on *Sviatoy Gavriil* from an outpost in Kamchatka, south of the channel.[53] Sailing in the service of Russian Tsar Peter I the Great who initiated the Great Northern Expedition in 1725, Captain Bering conducted several voyages together with Alexei Chirikov between 1733 and 1743 during which Alaska, Aleutian archipelago and Bering Island were discovered.[54] Except it proved the existence of the Eastern sea route (Northeast Passage) from European Russia to Asia, the expedition was a major success in detailed mapping of Eastern Siberia, the Northern Russian Far East Coast, Kamchatka and Kuril Islands and in recording the scientific information on indigenous populations, geography and history of the area. The great expedition came to be known as one of the major ventures of its scale in

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[45] Dixon, *Arrows and Atl Atls,* 20, 23-24.
[46] Brian Swann, ed., *Voices from Four Directions: Contemporary Translations of the Native Literatures of North America*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 3-4.
[47] http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/10/1018_051018_human_origins_2.html.
[48] Taken both from Russian and American perspectives.
[49] Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North,* 72.
[50] AMSA Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment Report 2009, Arctic Council, accessed April 28, 2015, http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/detect/documents/AMSA_2009_Report_2nd_print.pdf, 43.
[51] Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North,* 71.
[52] Ibid.
[53] AMSA, 43.
[54] AMSA, 42,

history. Financed by the Russian state solely, its cost of 1.5 million rubles (one-sixth of the Russian state's income in 1724) was an unprecedented amount of money spent on such a risky project which involved more than 3000 people.[55]

With the discovery of the easternmost region and northwestern tip of America began a Russian dominance period of the territory that lasted for almost 150 years until Russian America, Alaska, was sold to the United States. However, the Russian effort to establish a working business based mainly on a fur trade with the native peoples proved to be unprofitable.[56] The region was just too far from main economic, military and political centers of the Russian empire and was viewed as insignificant and unsustainable in contrast to the stakes Russia had at the European stage in the second half of the nineteenth century.[57]

At the end of the eighteenth century, an unprecedented business activity began in the Bering Strait that lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century. A large fur trade network unfolded in the region as a consequence of the Russian, British and later American expansion into the area and also as a huge demand for furs boomed in Europe, Asia and the United States.[58] And most importantly, it were local native peoples particularly, the Inuit and the Chukchi, not the Americans or Europeans who served as middlemen in the trade.[59] Local native tribes had been involved in the regional trade with other indigenous communities across the Strait for two thousand years. The local trade network gradually extended all over North America providing its indigenous communities goods and materials such as iron, bronze and others from distant countries.[60]

However, it was the arrival of Russians and establishment of the first trade fair in the region at the Kolyma River in 1789 that triggered creation of a global trade network in the area. Mediating the interchange of goods such as alcohol, tobacco, various tools, tea or porcelain coming from the Asian side and furs and walrus ivory from the American continent, the local native groups gained a huge control over the trade and contributed to

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[55] Ibid.

[56] "MILESTONES: 1866–1898: Purchase of Alaska, 1867," US Department of State, (accessed June 30, 2015), https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/alaska-purchase**.**

[57] "MILESTONES: 1866–1898: Purchase of Alaska, 1867," US Department of State, (accessed June 30, 2015), https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/alaska-purchase.

[58] Bockstoce, "Furs and Frontiers in the Far North,

[59] Alida Boorn, Review, □e Nineteenth-Century Bering Strait Fur Trade Network, Native People, and Global Commer of „John R. Bo□stoce. Furs and Frontiers in the Far North: □e Contest among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Strait Fur Trade. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010m "https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=32132, 1.

[60] Bockstoce, "Furs and Frontiers in the Far North," .

the global expansion and flow of these commodities and products.[61] Indeed, the notion of an exploited native is not quite proper. As historian John Bockstoce writes in his thoroughly researched book *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North*: *The Contest among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Strait Fur* "no matter which goods were exchanged, these transfers were almost universally regarded as advantageous by both parties."[62] Together with fur trade, it was the short-lived but radical period of whaling industry that formed the region in the nineteenth century. They both introduced the area to global trade network and had a profound impact on native communities due to interactions between them and newcomers.

Amidst those events, the US purchased Alaska from the Russian empire in 1867. The Alaska Purchase, known as Seward's folly or Seward's icebox, a that time because of then unreasonable price the United States had to pay Russia only several years after the Civil War had ended, has become a crucial geostrategic move for the United States.[63] Not only it put stop to the Russian expansion along the American Pacific Coast for good but the purchase signaled the rise of the Unites States as a great Asia-Pacific power too.[64] By acquiring the north westernmost tip of the continent, the US has gained access to Northern Pacific area and a seemingly unfruitful frozen land which, however, started paying off already thirty years into the purchase when gold was found in Alaska in the 1890s.[65] This was followed by an exploration of smaller oil and gas fields in the Southern parts of Alaska and booming timber and fishing industries soon after.[66]

However, what contributed to the BSR's and particularly Alaska's rise was World War II, the Cold War After the rapid deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union in the second half of the forties, the United States government decided to build a solid defense system and military bases in Alaska.[67] As General Mitchell hinted, its strategic location in the Arctic, the proximity of the Soviet Union and the fact that air paths are shortest at the

[61] Alida Boorn, Review, , 1.
[62] Bockstoce, "Furs and Frontiers in the Far North," xvi.
[63] *Claus M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, Alaska: A History of the 49th State, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 64-65; "MILESTONES: 1866–1898: Purchase of Alaska, 1867," US Department of State, (accessed June 30, 2015), https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/alaska-purchase.*
[64] "MILESTONES: 1866–1898: Purchase of Alaska, 1867."
[65] "MILESTONES: 1866–1898: Purchase of Alaska, 1867."
[66] Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 68-9, 242-243.
[67] Larry J. Hummel, "The U.S. Military as Geographical Agent: The Case of Cold War Alaska," *Geographical Review* 95 No. 1 (2005): 47-68; Cole, *North to the Future*, 128-130.

poles, made Alaska one of the top priorities of the US Government in regard to building a line of defense and military air bases at that time.[68]

Mutual Soviet-American relations were heating up as both nations set up their missiles and long-range bombers on either side of the Strait due to its close proximity. This provoked a crisis in the late forties in the Pacific Northwest, regional politicians and businesmen feared an attack on strategic and military sites could occur. The Boeing Company based in Seattle and local largest employer providing 25,000 jobs in the area even decided to move company's plant to Wichita in Kansas to prevent any potential damage by Soviet missile attacks in 1949 from the Soviet side of the BSR.[69] The scenario was averted at last when then Alaskan governor Ernest Gruening at a public hearing organized by the Seattle Chamber of Commerce proposed a plan to strengthen Alaska defenses by deploying a radar system that could detect Soviet attack in time. In the early fifties this led to an establishment of the Distant Early Warning Line – known as DEW line – which stretched from the American side of the Bering Strait to Canada's Baffin Island.[70] Apart from building new military bases and strengthening WWII facilities, massive arms race and rapid armament were characteristic for this period. Eilson Air Force Base was constructed near Fairbanks, then the largest airfield in the world.[71] This further demonstrates that the US government considered Alaska and the Arctic area as one of the nation's top priorities for its geostrategic location and recognized the need to protect it at the time.

Potential military conflict became a constant threat in the area during the 40-year long period. However, it was the case of a lost U-2 flight over the Bering Strait during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis on October 26, 1962 that brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war alongside the crisis in the Caribbean.[72] A regular U-2 flight conducted in order to report on Soviet nuclear activities and tests on Novaya Zemlya lost directions due to the northern lights over the Soviet eastern territory.[73] The pilot, Captain Maultsby started to be soon followed by Soviet Migs that were attempting to shoot him down. Simultaneously, the Cuban Missile Crisis was heating up bringing the world to the verge of

[68] Hummel, "The U.S. Military as Geographical Agent," 48; Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 131
[69] Walter R. Borneman, *Alaska: Saga of a Bold Lane*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 388- 390.
[70] Borneman, *Alaska: Saga of a Bold Lane*, 389- 390.
[71] Borneman, *Alaska: Saga of a Bold Lane*, 388.
[72] Michael Dobbs, "One Minute To Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War," The National Security Archive, *accessed April 8, 2015, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/dobbs/maultsby.htm.*

nuclear war. What is the most striking though is that then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was informed of the incident more than an hour into the pilot's disappearance over the enemy's territory.[74] During the heightened tensions he immediately informed President Kennedy who wrote to Khrushchev on October 29 that the pilot made a "serious navigational error" and that he "will see to it that every precaution is taken to prevent recurrence."[75] Not so very well-known sideline to the Cuban Crisis, the border skirmish demonstrates how grave it was when it almost led to an escalation of the conflict which was predominantly taking place in the Atlantic Ocean.

All those events gained Alaska a nation-wide attention as it became a strategic place for the United States during that time. And although its significance waned in the first decade after the Cold war ended for the United States with the emergence of new issues affecting the region, the geostrategic position of Alaska and the Bering Strait for the US has been asserted. The United States could not have influenced the events in the Arctic without having a direct access to the region via Alaska. The Arctic and the Bering Strait proved to be one of the major frontlines of the Cold War where nuclear tests and military threats happened regularly.

On the other hand, cooperative scientific efforts, especially in the area of the environment occurred during the latter decades of the Cold war.[76] These occasional meetings and work groups laid foundations for activities helping to dismantle the "Ice Curtain" and deepen scientific cooperation in decades following the end of the conflict and the dissolution of the USSR.[77] It was Mikhail Gorbachev's official spokesman, Gennadi I. Gerasimov, who used the term "Ice Curtain" during his short visit of the region in 1988.[78] Unlike wire fence, "Iron Curtain" dividing the Berlin Wall and Eastern from Western Europe, Alaska and Chukotka were separated by ice. The Bering Strait Region became known as the "Ice Curtain" during the Cold War as it was completely closed and no visits, vessel transits or flight were allowed. Activities that helped to thaw mutual relations included local native people whose cross-strait ties were forcibly interrupted in the late forties. Allowing American citizens of the Bering Strait's coastline to visit their families

[73] Dermot Cole, *North to the Future: The Alaska Story, 1959 – 2009*, (Kenmore: Epicenter Press, 2008), 241; Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 73-4.
[74] Dobbs, "One Minute To Midnight."
[75] Cole, *North to the Future,* 75.
[76] Scott Elias ad Klaus Dodds, "Bridges and bottlenecks: Andrei Sher's role in the development of international collaboration in Beringian science," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 30 (2011), 2049-2053.
[77] Elias and Dodds, "Bridges and bottlenecks: 2049-2053.

and relatives on Chukotka Peninsula marked the beginning of an end of the four-decade long animosities and fresh new start for both countries.[79]

1.3 Native population

People have occupied the Bering Strait surroundings since the time of the Bering Land Bridge for at least 10,000 years.[80] Today, there are approximately 9,000 native peoples[81] living on both sides of the Strait where they form a majority of all local residents.[82] To the cultural groups residing on the coastlines and in coastal areas of the Bering Strait Region belong the Siberian Yupik, Central Yupik and Inupiaq communities.[83] Additionally, the Chukchi after whom the Chukotka peninsula and the Autonomous Okrug has been named are not to be omitted even though they do not belong to the Inuit family.[84] As aforementioned, all these cultural groups have traded and been in a mutual contact through intermarriages, festivities, trade and wars to lesser or greater extent for millennia.

Residing on a land unsuitable for agriculture, they are primarily hunters who tremendously depend on marine resources which comprise the main part of their subsistence economies. Especially hunting marine mammals – bowhead whales, walrus, beluga whales and seals - along with fishing cod, salmon and other fish have always defined their traditional way of life and their culture.[85] Apart from being dependent on the marine animals as their diet is rich on nutrients, they utilize them for clothing, tools and other utensils. By an animal processing they make use of almost every part of the animals. Connected to their culture, spiritual beliefs, traditions and community of respective villages they form a centerpiece of their lives.[86] Only when working together they can

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[78] Peter A. Iseman, "Lifting Ice Curtain,"New York Times, October 23, 1988, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/23/magazine/lifting-the-ice-curtain.html.

[79] Sarah Hurst, "Alaska-Chukotka: when cousins reunite," *openDemocray* April 15, 2011, accessed March 28, 2015, https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/sarah-hurst/alaska-chukotka-when-cousins-reunite.

[80] "Bering Strait Region Case Study," 21.

[81] Individuals.

[82] "Bering Strait Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2013 – 2018," Published by Kawerak Community Planning and Development Program and The Bering Strait Development Council July 2013, 64.

[83] AMSA, 106.

[84] Bockstoce, "*Furs and Frontiers in the Far North*," 20, 50 , 72-77.

[85] Thomas L. Laughlin, Lisa Speer and Lawson W. Brigham, "IUCN/NRDC/UAF Workshop identify several viable options for the protection of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) from the possible negative effects of shipping and other maritime activities in the Bering Strait Region," Workshop Report, June 26-28, 2012,Nome, Alaska, USA, September 2012, accessed May 28, 2015 https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/nome_workshop_report_final.pdf, 10-11; "Bering Strait Region Case Study," 21.

[86] Laughlin, Lisa Speer and Lawson W. Brigham, "IUCN/NRDC/UAF Workshop," 10.

survive and even thrive in the harsh climate of the region. The Ocean and the Strait are so central to their lives because they provide them with everything they need. Any change to the fragile ecosystem can severely impact their subsistence resources and erode their ways of lives, culture and values.[87]

Apart from the ecosystem, it is local indigenous communities who are vulnerable to the current changes most. Apart from hunting, they also make use of other marine resources, i.e. clams, fish and seabirds' eggs. These together with salmon make up almost 87% of their total harvest, the number varying with regard to individual communities, the ones living in Gambell and Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island derive 95% from ocean-based resources.[88] This shows how much dependent local people are on marine resources and how vital they are to them.

In modern history, it were the massive whaling and sea otter hunting activities conducted by then world leading empires at the end of the nineteenth century which led to the first major disruption of the balance of the fragile ecosystem and the established order. However, although the region faced serious threats and even several clashes and minor battles during World War II and subsequent Cold war and Soviet-American rivalry, the climate changes happening now endanger the usual ways of lives the most. From the ecological viewpoint, later freeze ups of the Strait with thawing permafrost lead to the coastline's erosion that threatens native settlements alongside the coast and force them to relocate.[89]

The fragile ecosystem and the indigenous peoples have lived in compliance with the environment for thousands of years. The natives have always been an integral part of the local environment, fragile balance between the landscape, humans and animals. Although disrupted by the arrival of "newcomers" centuries ago and current environmental changes impacting the regional ecosystem, the native communities will likely rely on marine-based resources in the future and subsistence economies will still constitute essential part of their lives. According to the report on Arctic marine areas by Arctic Council, "the cooperative hunting of large marine mammals and the use of all available marine resources for nutritional, cultural and economic needs will persist in the region."[90]

[87] Laughlin, Lisa Speer and Lawson W. Brigham, "IUCN/NRDC/UAF Workshop," 10.
[88] "Bering Strait Regional Case Study," 22-23.
[89] Bering Strait Regional Study, 6; Charles K. Ebinger and Evie Zambetakis, The Geopolitics of Arctic Melt, International Affairs 85: 6, 2009, 1215.
[90] AMSA, 108.

2. Challenges and Opportunities

In 1935, six years before Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, then US general William Mitchell stated "he who holds Alaska will hold the world and I think it is the most important strategic place in the world."[91] Even though he proclaimed it amidst war, his saying is still valid today, for Alaska due to its proximity to USSR became the US advanced outpost for its strategic position during the Cold War. The Strait back then truly divided the bipolar world, it became a narrow but effective barrier.

Indeed, Alaska and the Bering Strait region held a central role in the military affairs of the Cold War era and now they can acquire the strategic position again as new challenges have emerged in the area. As the bipolar world order ceased to exist more than two decades ago, it is watery ways, straits and canals in particular that are of crucial importance to ensure safe, quick and smooth delivery and interchange of goods, products but also innovation and technology in the more and more globalized world. For in the Straits and canals ship collisions, closures and attacks may occur which can severely impact the transport and global trade in general. Furthermore, if the strait or canal is located in a politically unstable region the delivery can also be negatively affected as the shipping companies are forced to find new ways.

On the other hand, such chokepoints can also become places of conflicts and their security and international character have to be secured to ensure safe and incident-free passing through. As aforementioned, the Bering Strait region possesses several specific characteristics. Any recent activity, industrial, commercial or ecological has been made possible due to environmental changes and a decreasing sea ice coverage which are becoming evident in the northern region of the Earth most. As it connects two major geopolitical blocks, the Asia-Pacific with its fast-growing markets and the Arctic, whose natural resources and shipping routes are becoming more accessible year by year, also the geopolitical significance of the Bering Strait as the only corridor between them is on the rise rapidly. Triggered by the climate change, the dynamic region has become exposed to abrupt changes that on one side bring new opportunities for industrial development and commercial activity in the area but also challenges to its fragile ecosystem and local communities.

2.1 Climate Change

Climate change stands behind all the major developments and actions affecting the region whether considered as a main driving force or a trigger to other changes related to it. Apart from the diminishing sea ice coverage, climate change is also affecting the local Arctic conditions turning the ecosystem rather to a subarctic region.[92] This profoundly impacts local species and the surrounding waters, luring in non-native ones to settle there.

Another problem the region faces is the ocean acidification that causes corrosive surface of colder waters.[93] Scientists fear this will likely happen in the Arctic waters as the acidification process already started in the Chukchi and in the Bering Seas where it has contributed to corrosion and to the lack of calcium carbonate mineral already. Although even the experts do not exactly know what consequences the acidification, caused by carbon dioxide´s absorption into water, will have on the region, clear is it will influence and alter the region's ecosystem and character.[94]

As the Arctic regions are warming faster than rest of the world, the most immediate consequences climate change puts on the Arctic are the reduction of seasonal sea ice in summer, thinning of the year-round ice and opening up of sea lanes. It further extends the ice-free season well into the fall and possibly earlier in the spring. This in turn causes longer shipping seasons that could collide with spring and fall migratory seasons of marine mammals and seabirds.[95] Ice-dependent sea species flow and migrate via the Bering Strait as ice retreats and advances throughout the year. As it is the only migration corridor for many wildlife species, an increased traffic, noise and collision possibility with vessels can impact them profoundly.[96]

Moreover, offshore reserves of mineral resources are becoming more accessible, and for longer periods too, which can again have negative impacts on the region's environment and communities as the extraction and transportation can also disrupt the

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[91] Claus M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick*, Alaska: A History of the 49th State*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 122.
[92] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region," 44.
[93] Ibid., 45.
[94] Ibid., 45.
[95] AMSA, 153.
[96] Thomas L. identify several viable options for the protection of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) from the possible negative effects of shipping and other maritime activities in the Bering Strait Region,"
Workshop Report, June 26-28, 2012,Nome, Alaska, USA, September 2012, https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/nome_workshop_report_final.pdf, 15.

local ecosystem severely.[97] As the only gateway from Pacific area to the Arctic, all the changes influencing much larger region accumulate in this very tiny part of the northern hemisphere exposing it to all the consequences related to climate change. Without any cooperative efforts and regulation by the world community and organizations to balance the industrial development with environmental protection can have irreversible consequences.

Despite the warnings, many top politicians and representatives are still rather sceptical about climate change, especially in the United States, and do not regard it a highly important issue in their foreign policy or national security agenda issues. One of the rare proponents of a greater US involvement in the region is US rear admiral David Titley. He criticizes the US Navy and Government for its low engagement in the region when claiming that "the opening of the Arctic is the most immediate national security challenge presented by climate change… The Arctic is poorly charted and therefore dangerous to navigation. There's very little infrastructure and it's an extremely harsh operating environment."[98] In his articles and statements he often emphasizes the need to comprehend the region and its changes and not to fall behind other countries. He points out the rising significance of the Bering Strait as a major infrastructure hub and compares it to the importance of the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca and Panama Canal predicting it may even surpass them in the future as the Arctic sea routes will become favorable and even safer to transport goods and oil and gas.[99]

2.2 Economic and Industrial development

With the reduction of ice-cover, prospects for economic development emerge in the region. Foremost, the estimated natural resources of the area are more accessible due to

[97] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region," 51-53.

[98] David Titley, "Climate Change Series: Global Warming A Threat To National Security," Wbur, February 20, 2013, accessed May 1, 2015, http://cognoscenti.wbur.org/2013/02/20/climate-national-security-david-titley

[99] David, Titley, "2.1 Global Climate Change," Climate and Energy Proceedings 2010, John Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, accessed 30 July, 2015. 35 http://www.jhuapl.edu/ClimateAndEnergy/Book/Author/Titley,%20David.pdfhttp://www.jhuapl.edu/ClimateAndEnergy/Book/Author/Titley,%20David.pdf; "Statement of Read Admiral David Titley Oceanographer of the Navy Director, Task Force Climate Change before the House Committee on Science and Technology, Subcommittee on Energy and Environment on the Navy's Climate Change Interests," US House of Representatives, Committee on Science, Space and Technology. November 17, 2010, accessed July 30, 2015, 4

milder climate conditions. Given the fact that the Arctic Ocean and Northern seas are ice-free during the summer months and on top of that they freeze up later year by year, the period to explore the mineral deposits is expanding and also their extraction is becoming more feasible.[100] In addition with the technological advance and innovation, drilling possibilities are no longer a distant future scenario.

Large undiscovered petroleum deposits in the region are to be found north of the Bering Strait, in the Chukchi and also Beaufort Seas. The US Geological Survey (USGS) estimates there might be 23 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil and 108 trillion cubic feet of natural gas offshore on the Outer Continental Shelf.[101] The Chukchi Sea deposits contain up to 12 billion barrels of oil and 54 trillion cubic feet of natural gas according to estimations according to Alaska Oil and Gas Association.[102] In the US part of the Eastern Chukchi Sea, northwest of the Strait, estimated oil reserves reach up to 4.3 billion barrels of oil, which is a substantially higher number than 1 billion barrels pictured in previous reports.[103] In 2013 it was estimated that first oil could be drilled and produced in 2022 for the Chukchi Sea's waters are deeper and worse charted than the Beaufort Sea from where first barrels of oil could be transported as soon as of 2020.[104] However, these estimates are now rather out of date after new BOEM's draft program was released at the beginning of 2015.

In January 2015 when the US Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Management Agency (BOEM) issued a new five-year-leasing draft plan *2017 to 2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program (DPP),* a big decision was made. As BOEM's task is to manage the Outer Continental Shelf and plan five-year program for lease sales outlining the following period, the announcement in January was a huge victory for environmentalists. The reason behind it is that the Alaskan offshore areas in the Chukchi Sea unlike new sales planned in the Atlantic area are to be

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http://archives.democrats.science.house.gov/Media/file/Commdocs/hearings/2010/Energy/17nov/Titley_Testimony.pdf,

[100] AMSA, 106.

[101] http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/03/offshore-oil-gas-governance-arctic/Offshore-Oil-and-Gas-Governance-web.pdf?la=en, 5.

[102] Alaska Oil and Gas Association, http://www.aoga.org/sites/default/files/news/12_03_13_aoga_comments_on_ocs_lease_sale_237_final.pdf, 1.

[103] Yereth Rosen, "Federal regulators issue Chukchi environmental review, possibly a step toward resuming drilling," Alaska Dispatch News, October 31, 2014, accessed May 1, 2015, http://www.adn.com/article/20141031/federal-regulators-issue-chukchi-environmental-review-possibly-step-toward-resuming.

set aside and banned for further sales. This can be regarded as a first step to balance interests of opposing groups, environmentalists, oil companies and native communities.

> The DPP schedules a potential Chukchi Sea sale in 2022 that excludes the 25-mile coastal buffer and subsistence deferral areas… the Chukchi Sea coastal area has been recognized as an important bowhead whale migration corridor, coastal habitat for many bird species, and a protective buffer to offshore subsistence areas and resources for communities along the coast.[105]

The Obama's administration puts hold to lease sales in offshore Alaska, setting special areas off limits and allowing only one potential lease in the Chukchi Sea and another in the Beaufort Sea as announced by Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and BOEM's Director Abigail Ross Hoppe in January 2015.[106] The main reason behind it is that there are more oil deposits in Gulf of Mexico which are also easier to extract and drilled as there is already suitable infrastructure and facilities.[107] Also the distance from the hinterland plays a role. If disaster emerges, the fast reaction is crucial to prevent any more damages. The offshore Alaska Coast, its harsh conditions, missing infrastructure and ecological importance of sea areas close to planned drilling areas motivated the Administration to put hold to lease they set aside special areas in the Chukchi and also Beaufort Seas from any energy development there. Putting emphasis on oil development in the Gulf of Mexico and also offshore the Atlantic coast The planned buffer zone should ensure coastal communities to practice their hunting and subsistence way of life, as it is designed to be an untouched zone for marine mammals and seabirds.[108] President Obama in accordance with the Draft Proposed Program (DPP) aims at protecting this crucial biological hotspot and one of the last marine wildernesses, while opening 80 percent of estimated technically recoverable oil and gas resources in offshore US waters in the Gulf

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[104] http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=BOEM-2014-0096-0001; http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Arctic_oil_and_gas/$FILE/Arctic_oil_and_gas.pdf, 11.

[105] "2017 to 2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program," BOEM, accessed May 2, 2015, US Department of the Interior, http://www.boem.gov/2017-2022-DPP/, S-6-7.

[106] "Interior Department Announces Draft Strategy for Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing," US Department of Interior, Accessed May 08, 2015, http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-draft-strategy-for-offshore-oil-and-gas-leasing.cfm.

[107] "Interior Department Announces Draft Strategy for Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing."

[108] Mike Boots and Dan Utech, "President Obama Protects Untouched Marine Wilderness in Alaska," White House, accessed May, 12, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/01/27/president-obama-protects-untouched-marine-wilderness-alaska.

of Mexico and in the Atlantic Ocean to endorse economic development and reduce US energy dependency on foreign oil and gas.[109]

The reason why BOEM has decided to put a hold on Chukchi Sea Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Lease Sale 193 has stated the BOEM's Acting Director Walter Cruickshank already in October 2014: "BOEM used a new exploration and development scenario to evaluate the potential environmental effects of oil and gas activities associated with Lease Sale 193 … we continue to take a balanced approach to the safe and responsible energy development in the region."[110] This marks a big step in balancing both parties, advocates of Arctic economic development and environmentalists.

Apart from offshore mineral resources, other commercial activities of the region encompass tourism, mining and commercial fishing. Some of the world's most productive fisheries are in the Bering Sea with more than 40% of all US fish and shell a year comes from this area.[111] In the area around the Strait, fishing activities are limited to local use mainly.

Deposits of graphite, tin, copper, lead, platinum, silver, coal and zinc are known to be in the area in such quantities enabling potential commercial development.[112] Nevertheless it is gold that leads the region's mining industry today. On the Seward's peninsula and alongside the Alaskan Coastline of the Bering Strait, several smaller gold mines are scattered. As the price of gold has soared recently, the viable and rising gold business in the region around Nome attracts new miners to come to the area as the sale of docking mining permits in 2012 showed.[113] With the increase of gold-dredge vessels in the region which were regarded as recreational watercraft, new safety rules for these vessels as they number has risen steadily recently were needed to adopt. Therefore, the US Coast Guard decided to start classifying them as commercial craft since the summer 2015 as this classification fulfill the requirements.[114]

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[109] Boots,"President Obama Protects Untouched Marine Wilderness in Alaska."

[110] "BOEM releases Revised Analysis for Chukchi Sea Oil and Gas Lease Sale 193," Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, accessed May, 12, 2015, http://www.boem.gov/Press10312014/.

[111] "Arctic Sea Ice Decline: Projected Changes in Timing and Extent of Sea Ice," 2.

[112] "Bering Strait Comprehensive Economic Developmnet Strategy 2013-2018," July 2013, (accessed July 2, 2015),http://www.kawerak.org/forms/csd/2013%20Comprehensive%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy.pdf, 83; "Bering Strait Region Case Study," 30-31..

[113] "Bering Strait Comprehensive Economic Development," 83.

[114] Yereth Rosen, "Polar Code approval is timely for busy Bering Strait, Alaska Dispatch News," May 25, 2015, http://www.adn.com/article/20150525/polar-code-approval-timely-busy-bering-strait.

2.3 Transportation

However, the economic development, extraction of mineral resources and fishing would not be possible at all if ships could not pass through the Strait. The safe passage of vessels is crucial for any future economic activity, development and global trade.

As an international chokepoint opening up more year by year, the Bering Strait is undoubtedly becoming a very strategic point of global importance for both local and inter-regional shipping and traffic.[115] Due to the ice shrinkage in the Arctic Ocean and Seas, the Arctic transportation through the main two Arctic routes will likely increase. In that scenario, the Arctic Straits will become crucial in the Northern navigation. In that, the Bering Strait will be even more pivotal than Atlantic channels, because as aforementioned, it is the one and only corridor linking the Arctic and the Pacific area.

Straits and canals have always been of capital importance. Historically, the tendency has been to search shortest ways to reach a desired destination to save time, distance and costs as much as possible. Straits have therefore become commercially and strategically very significant points, which on the other side led to legal and policy implications. That resulted in the adoption of various international or national regimes, agreements and legal statutes, the most significant one being the Part III of the Law of the Sea (LOS) Convention entitled "Straits for International Navigation."[116]

The Bering Strait, with three major Asian markets, Japan, South Korea and China in its close proximity is crucial for future shipping from these countries to Europe and American East Coast. However, what makes it treacherous is its shallow and narrow character, lack of any major ports, insufficient infrastructure and missing aid points which will make the navigation highly complicated as the volume of vessels is steadily rising.[117] At its narrowest point the Strait is further divided by Little and Big Diomede Islands into the Bering Strait-East, Diomede Channel and Bering-Strait-West. On the other hand, a great advantage of the channel over more used corridors such as Suez Canal, Straits of Hormuz and Malacca is its distant geographic location from any centers or politically unstable regions. That considerably diminishes the potential threat of terrorist or pirate attacks in the area.[118]

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[115] Donald R. Rothwell, "International Straits and Trans-Arctic Navigation," *Ocean Development & International Law*, 43 (2012) :267–282, 267-268.

[116] Donald R. Rothwell, "International Straits and Trans-Arctic Navigation," *Ocean Development & International Law*, 43:267–282, 2012, 267-270.

[117] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region," 48-53

[118] Young, "*The Arctic in world affairs,"* 49.

However, the Arctic waters were poorly charted for a very long time and until late 1970s, no scientific field research had been conducted in regard to year-round traffic in the US Arctic. Then, the U.S. Maritime Administration conducted a several field research studies between 1979-86 to assess the feasibility of the area's ice coverage, ice and seas' conditions.[119] Projects executed within the program of the U.S. Arctic Marine Transportation comprised deployment of icebreakers, fifteen voyages and collection of valuable data regarding the region's geography and climate. Those findings served as an important source for future plans and cross-boundary initiatives.[120] One of the main conclusions of the report was that "the offshore Bering, Chukchi and Beaufort seas are extremely dynamic and ship icebreaking activities must be able to cope with the ever-changing ice environment. The most critical elements for successful ice navigation are crew skills and applied technology."[121] In time when the Cold War was still a reality, the key findings of the program showed that joint cooperation was needy.

Apart from local shipping and vessel activity concentrating on local economic activities, development, drilling activities north of the channel and scientific research, the Bering Strait comprises an integral part of Northern sea routes as their point of exit/entry.[122] Two main Arctic sea lanes, the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route, both still poorly charted waters, proceed through the Bering Strait as their gateway the Pacific zone. This will put even more strain on the region, because unlike the Atlantic channels which are wider and there are several of them, all the traffic to or from the Pacific area has to pass via the narrow Bering Strait.

However, the advantages of using the routes as shipping lanes from Europe to the Pacific are huge. They can save money by reducing transportation costs, and cut sailing time and distance significantly compared to traditional ways through Panama and Suez Canals, and Strait of Hormuz.[123] In case of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) shipping, savings can be made up to 35-60% in distance from Northern Europe to the Far East.[124] The distance from Western Europe to the Asian Far East can be reduced by 20% - 40%.[125] "Several marine route distances are notable: from Murmansk to the Bering Strait it is 3,074

[119] AMSA, 48.
[120] AMSA, 48.
[121] AMSA, 48.
[122] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck,", 50-51; AMSA, 112
[123] Ibid.
[124] AMSA, 44.
[125] Lassi Heinenen, Alexander Serguning and Gleb Yarovoy, "Russian Startegies in the Arctic: Avoiding a New Cold War," Valdai Discussion Club, Gratnees Report Moscov, September 2012, 67.

nautical miles; and the Northern Sea Route from Kara Gate to the Bering Strait is 2,551 nautical miles long,"[126] according to the findings in the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment conducted by the Arctic Council in 2009. Also, the transit between Russia's European and North American Coast will shorten significantly, as the journey from Murmansk to Vancouver through the Bering Strait takes 9,600 km compared to 16,000 km through Panama Canal.[127] The great advantage is in cutting time, distance and money. However, fishing boats, ecotourism, commercial and passenger vessels still comprise the majority of all the current ships navigating in the region.

At present, the volume of vessel traffic passing the Strait can be characterized as low with a short operating period from July to mid-October usually.[128] However, the number of transiting vessels has been increasing significantly since the early nineties. Between 2008 and 2012, the maritime transit in the Bering Strait increased by 118 percent as [129] and in 2012 alone more than 500 ships and vessels passed the Bering Strait.[130]

The trend of increasing marine traffic is estimated to continue in next years and decades. As the Northern climate warms and ice retreats, possibilities for mineral resources extraction are expanding and the Polar sea routes are becoming economically more viable.[131] Since 2010, when Russia carried out the voyage of a carrier full of 70,000 tons of gas from Murmansk to Nigbo, China marked the beginning of commercial possibilities for Northern Sea Route.[132] It took only 22 days to complete the journey compared to the traditional shipping way through the Suez Canal which usually takes approximately 40 days.[133] Soon other carriers followed the suit, when the Norwegian carrier Tschudi became the first non-Russian cargo ship using the NSR when transporting iron ore from Kirkenes, Norway to Lianyungang.[134] But it was the successful passage of Russian supertanker Vladimir Thikonov in the summer of 2011 which carried 120,000 tons of gas condensate

[126] AMSA, 23.
[127] Lassi Heinenen, "Russian Startegies in the Arctic: Avoiding a New Cold War," 68.
[128] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region," 46; AMSA, 20.
[129] "NOAA's Arctic Action Plan," U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 3, accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.cnas.org/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/CNAS_ArcticHighNorth_policybrief_RosenbergTitleyWiker.pdf
[130] Kevin Hillmer-Pegram, and M. D. Robards, "Relevance of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area to the Bering Strait Region: a Policy Analysis Using Resilience-Based Governance Principles," *Ecology and Society* 20, 1, (2015): 26. http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol20/iss1/art26/.
[131] AMSA, 7-19.
[132] Oran R. Young, Jong Deog Kim, Yoon Hyung Kim, The Arctic in world affairs : a North Pacific dialogue on Arctic marine issues : 2012 North Pacific Arctic Conference proceedings (Seoul: Korea Maritime Institute, 2012), 2.
[133] R. Young, "*The Arctic in world affairs,"* 2.
[134] Ibid.

from Cape Desire in the Kara Sea to Cape Dezhnev in the Bering Strait that finally proved that the NSR had prospects for long-distance shipping of hydrocarbons.[135]

2.4 Ports and Infrastructure

The commercial marine traffic passing via the Strait falls into three categories as divided by the US Coast Guard: "destinational shipping, trans-Arctic shipping, and adventure tourism."[136] Destinational shipping is bound to commercial activity in and around the Strait. It supports coastal native villages with energy and other supplies and comprises vessels conducting oil drilling operations and transport ships bringing ore from mines in northern Alaska to North American and Asian markets.[137] The Bering Strait is a focal corridor for these ship routes, however, the number of vessels coming to the Strait through Northern Route or Northwest Passage is relatively small compared to destinational shipping which comprises majority of traffic passes. Even though the number of passing vessels is increasing significantly, given the insufficient infrastructure and varying ice conditions, it is not expected that any of the routes can be largely used for large-scale shipping in a near future according to US Coast Guard survey.[138] The USCG further expects that tourism-related activities will also increase, despite the fact that currently only very limited number of tours sail to the BSR and to northern Alaskan coast.[139]

The American side of the channel supports three biggest and most important ports - Nome, Kotzebue and DeLong Terminal. The main ports on the Russian coast are Provideniya, Anadyr and Evgekinot. None of them is a deep-water point which complicates the traffic, as no deep-draft vessels can anchor when in need of repair or refuge.[140] The closest deep-water ports are Dutch Harbor and Provideniya on the Russian side which is the only one open for international vessels.[141]

As aforementioned, the Bering Strait is recognized as an international strait under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In a case study on the Bering Strait conducted by the Arctic Council in its Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment

[135] R. Young, "*The Arctic in world affairs,"* 2.
[136] USCG Arctic Strategy, 13.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] "Bering Strait Region Case Study," 26-28.
[141] AMSA, 175.

report, is the corridor described as "one of the narrowest sea lanes in the world."[142] However, it is not owned by any of the two littoral states, nor is there an international law regulating the vessel and ship activity passing through the gateway until the IMO's Polar Code[143] comes into effect in 2017.[144] Therefore, in this natural chokepoint increasing vessel activity poses opportunities but risks and challenges too such as pollution, ship collisions, noise, oil spills and other ecological problems, ship strikes on marine mammals and disturbance of local communities and their subsistence economies.[145] As Hartsig et al argue the most problematic is that "at present, there are few protective measures in place to improve safety, reduce the risk of accidents, or mitigate environmental impacts associated with increased commercial vessel traffic in the Bering Strait and surrounding waters."[146]

Search and rescue operations, navigational aids, deep water ports and other facilities are limited or missing completely, therefore, such measures and solutions have to be implemented to prevent any incidents that are more likely to occur as the commercial shipping and industrial development activities are expanding.[147] Furthermore, the US Coast Guard has no permanent year-round bases in the area, the closest being on Kodiak Island more than 1000 miles away to the South.[148] Moreover, as the management of the Strait is absent too, therefore a joint cooperation of Russia and the United States is absolutely essential to secure safe and smooth functioning of the passage, traffic and the region's environment in general.[149] This opens a space for further bilateral cooperative efforts and opportunities. Apart from that, as already mentioned local people will be exposed to potential incidents arising from increasing marine traffic such as noise, strikes of animals or fishing vessels with larger and cargo ships, oil spills, pollution and insufficient infrastructure. All these potential threats can severely disrupt the fragile ecosystem, subsistence economies and lives of native communities and utterly alter them.

The absence of any cooperative management of the increasing transportation is of a great concern to the United States Coast Guard Admiral Thomas Ostebo. He compares the

[142] AMSA, 147.
[143] The Polar Code is discussed in this chapter.
[144] Anna Rose MacArthur, "US, Russia Drafting Voluntary Bering Strait Passage Regulations," January 17, 2014, Alaska Public Media, accessed April 18, 2015, http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/01/17/us-russia-drafting-voluntary-bering-strait-passage-regulations/
[145] "Workshop on Expanded Shipping and Other Marine Activities and the Ecology of the Bering Strait Region," Workshop II Report October 31 - November 2, 2012 Washington, DC USA, (accessed Junly, 10, 2015), https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/iucn_beringworkshopii2013.pdf, 13.
[146] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region," 36.
[147] Hartsig, 48-52
[148] Hartsig, 48-9.
[149] Hartsig, "Arctic Bottleneck: Protecting the Bering Strait Region," 36.

Bering Strait to the Panama Canal arguing that it is becoming the most significant international marine passage since the Panama Canal was built.[150] To prepare preventive measures that would cover for the yet non-existing international shipping law he calls for a voluntary agreement between the US Coast guard and its Russian counterpart. Coast guard of both countries are already working on a draft of regulations that would help to set up a regime for the passage of vessels and ships via the Bering Strait, even though on a voluntarily basis at the time being. Such a regime would serve the Strait until the International Maritime Organization (IMO) will pass an international law governing the Strait which will take years to implement as Ostebo fears.[151] He believes that ships and vessels would follow the voluntary agreement as a best standard practice to avoid any collisions and problems in the area.

Olin Stradler from the Arctic Institute also calls attention to the lack of traffic management: "No place is more critical to safety in the Arctic than the confined waters of the Bering Strait."[152] As there is no traffic management system, he proposes a creation of the Bering Strait Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) that would aim at helping to prevent risks emerging due to increased shipping. As an example to follow he mentions the already existing VTS in the Barents Sea which proved successful since established.

Amid these discussions, a major achievement was reached in May 2015 when the United Nations special specialized agency IMO approved International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code), a set of mandatory and binding international vessel standards to ensure safety for new and existing commercial ships, Arctic people and ecosystems in Arctic and Antarctic waters.[153] The Code is supposed to come into force on January 1, 2017, until then, in the Code's implementation, period maritime states have to adopt the Polar Code into their national legal systems.[154] The Code will then create an international regime providing a binding framework for vessels and ships in polar waters. Apart from safety measures for ships and provisions ensuring pollution prevention, "the Polar Code is intended to cover the full range of shipping-related matters relevant to navigation in waters surrounding the two poles – ship design, construction and equipment;

[150] MacArthur, "US, Russia Drafting Voluntary Bering Strait Passage Regulations."
[151] MacArthur, "US, Russia Drafting Voluntary Bering Strait Passage Regulations."
[152] Olin Stradler, "A Bering Strait Vessel Traffic Service: Critical Infrastructure for an Opening Arctic (Part I)," http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/01/17/us-russia-drafting-voluntary-bering-strait-passage-regulations/ vessel-trafc-service.html.
[153] "Polar Code," International Martitme Organization (accessed July 14, 2015), http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/polar/Pages/default.aspx; IMO Polar Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters, Policy Brief n°4, Arctic Climate Change Economy and Society, 1-2.

operational and training concerns; search and rescue; and, equally important, the protection of the unique environment and eco-systems of the polar regions."[155] This approval is a big step forward for Arctic shipping, and for the Bering Strait region especially. Given its geographic nature and conditions, the Bering Strait is highly prone and vulnerable to collisions and damages as vessel activity is on the rise. This could have far reaching consequences on the region, seafarers and ships' crew. The most crucial provision is that the Code will be mandatory for all maritime countries. And even though it does not cover or address some issues affecting the Arctic region – seabirds protection, Northern shipping lanes, it is not specific on oil spill prevention or restriction of heavy fuel oils and their transition to lighter fuels - it is regarded as a huge milestone in the management of the Arctic marine shipping and environment.[156] The IMO will not be directly enforcing the Polar Code, as it will be the task of the flag and port states. As the Arctic states are both port and flag states, they will enforce the Polar Code through their national programs and jurisdictions and will make sure that ships sailing the Arctic waters will observe the Code regulations and rules.[157]

3. Regional Players

Apart from parties from players directly involved in the region, United States through the State of Alaska, Russian Federation through Chukotka Autonomous Okrug and local native peoples, the region attracts area also other states. These groups are interested in the BST region mainly because it is a gateway to the Arctic, and therefore a crucial point of entry/exit for alternative viable shipping routes to/from Europe or Asia-Pacific markets and to economic opportunities in the Arctic.

3.1 United States

The United States was for a very long time a reluctant Arctic power having no strong identifications with the High North as 49 states are located far away from this

[154] IMO Polar Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters, 1,4.
[155] "Polar Code," International Martitme Organization (accessed July 14, 2015), http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/polar/Pages/default.aspx.
[156] Rosen, "Polar Code approval is timely for busy Bering Strait;" IMO Polar Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters, Policy Brief n°4, Arctic Climate Change Economy and Society, 1-2., 4.
[157] "Polar Code," 4.

Northern region. Scott Borgerson wrote on the US Arctic reluctance in 2008 that "[t]hrough its own neglect, the world's sole superpower -- a country that borders the Bering Strait and possesses over 1,000 miles of Arctic coastline -- has been left out in the cold."[158] The fact that the US has not yet ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) long endorses the notion.[159] A key instrument for the legal settlement of marine areas is regarded to be an essential document dealing with and solving legal issues in the Arctic. Moreover, it requires its signatories to take cooperative measures in the region to create standards, rules and pledges them to protect the Arctic environment. As all the Arctic States have ratified it except for the United States, it further undermines the US role in the region. The US approach to the region and BS has slowly started to change in recent years with its increasing global importance. However, to find information or references about the Bering Strait, the official US documents, policy papers, reports and national strategies on the Arctic have to be analyzed as there are almost none regarding specifically the BSR.

The national US Arctic policy began to be formulated in 2009 when the Bush administration ten days before it's the end of its term released the National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 66 which focused on the Arctic region policy.[160] It was the first governmental document outlining national agenda for the Arctic region. Nevertheless, it was not until Obama's second presidential term that the National Arctic policy became more specified. In 2013, the Obama Administration released a long-anticipated *National Strategy for the Arctic region* that many had called for because the Bush directive regarding the Arctic was rather vague and limited in scope.[161] In the strategy, Obama Administration pledges to advance US security interests in the region, pursue responsible Arctic region stewardship, and strengthen US international cooperation in a collaborative

[158] Borgerson, S. G. (2008). Arctic meltdown. Foreign Affairs, 87(2), 63-77 https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/arctic-antarctic/2008-03-02/arctic-meltdown.

[159] According to opponents, the main objection to the UNCLOS ratification is that it would undermine US sovereignty. Furtermore, they claim, it would interfere with the US military interests and have economic disadvantages regarding the taxation on mineral resource extraction in the US exclusive economic zone. Ernest Z. Bower and Gregory B. Poling, "Advancing the National Interests of the United States: Ratification of the Law of the Sea," Center for Strategic & International Studies, May 25, 2012, accessed July 31, 2015, http://csis.org/publication/advancing-national-interests-united-states-ratification-law-sea.

[160] National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) NSPD-66, January 2009, (http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-66.htm)

[161] Mihaela David, "U.S. National Strategy for the Arctic Region: Strong Foothold or on Thin Ice?" Center for Circumpolar Studies, Arctic Institute, accessed April 28, 2015, http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/2013/05/us-national-strategy-for-arctic-region.html.

manner and innovative approach.[162] An important point in the document concerns their commitment to ratify the UNCLOS, on top of that, the emphasis is put on using both the scientific research and traditional knowledge to better comprehend the region.[163]

This further shows US strong will to pursue a more decisive role in the region as it sends a message that it does not intend to lag behind other Arctic countries anymore. Furthermore, it signals to American citizens as to the world community and other states that the US is ready to take its responsibility and play a more active role in the Arctic.[164] However, not once is the Bering Strait area mentioned in the document, neither other US Arctic regions are. On top of that, the strategy lacks any clear steps how to carry out the outlined objectives in practice and how to accomplish its goals.

Therefore, the White House issued *Implementation Plan for The National Strategy for the Arctic Region* eight months later in January 2014. The document outlines the methodology, process, and approach for executing the *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, basically it provides more concrete steps on how the Arctic national policy will be implemented.[165]

The other departmental and federal documents are based on the *National* s*trategy* as it is the central document on US Arctic policy. The Arctic agenda falls mainly under the auspices of the Department of State (DOS), which is responsible for principal US Arctic actions and issues.[166] It endorses cooperative scientific efforts with other states and agencies by participating in various multinational platforms, and it also supports various meetings and events with regard to the Arctic and climate change. On a long-term basis, one of its top priorities is the US ratification of the UNCLOS. Moreover, it provides funding to various national agencies, such as the *Global Climate Change Initiative and Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs* (OES). Apart from that it also funds regional and local projects such as Bering Sea Sub-Network, an international community-based alliance bringing together Russian and American coastal indigenous settlements alongside the Bering Strait to observe and monitor the marine

[162] "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," White House, May 10, 2013, accessed April 28, 2015, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf, 2, 6-9.
[163] "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," 2, 7-9.
[164] David, "U.S. National Strategy for the Arctic Region: Strong Foothold or on Thin Ice?"
[165] "Implementation Plan for The National Strategy for the Arctic Region," White House, accessed April 28, 2015,
,https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/implementation_plan_for_the_national_strategy_for_the_arctic_region_-_fi....pdf
[166] Conley, "The New Foreign Policy Frontier: U.S Interests," 31.

environment.[167] The Bureau sends out its officials to lead the US delegation and represent United States at the Arctic Council. Further, the OES has become a strong proponent of UNCLOS and calls for its ratification in the United States as it abides to the treaty's provisions anyway.[168] By ratifying, the US would overcome a great obstacle in the Bering Strait because it would allow the United States to impose environmental regulations, to manage marine traffic and to regulate the vessel activity in its part of the Strait.[169]

The US Coast Guard (USCG), followed the White House and issued its latest *Arctic Strategy* in May 2013, eleven days after the Obama Administration did. USCG belongs to the few federal agencies whose units are present in the Arctic waters permanently. By being directly deployed and working actively in the region, its responsibility is to ensure safe, smooth and environmentally friendly vessel activity in the area.[170] Former USCG Commandant, Admiral Robert Papp, tackled the issue of the US Navy's absence in the Arctic stating that Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greener undermines the geopolitical significance of the Arctic waters and the Bering Strait in particular when he thinks that the Arctic "is more of a maritime governance issue and not a national defense issue, they [US Navy] are just as happy that the United States Coast Guard is taking on those responsibilities."[171] Papp claims that national security issues around the world occupy the US Navy entirely. Therefore, its presence in the Arctic waters is not necessary when USCG units are stationed there. Admiral Greener had not even mentioned the Bering Strait in his US Navy slideshow on today's and tomorrow's strategic sea corridors around the world. It was only when Admiral Papp criticized the omission of the Strait that Admiral Greener added the corridor to his slideshow.[172] On top of that, the Admiral uses such a map projection that distorts the upper latitudes which then show the Bering Strait much wider than in reality (even wider than the Davis Strait between Greenland and Canada).[173]

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[167] Conley, "The New Foreign Policy Frontier: U.S Interests," 31.
[168] Conley, "The New Foreign Policy Frontier: U.S Interests," 31.
[169] Conley, "The New Foreign Policy Frontier: U.S Interests," 31;"United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea: Agreement Relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the Convention," Article 42, United Nations, accessed May 2, 2015, http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_ agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm.
[170] "U.S. Coast Guard: Arctic Strategy," Council on Foreign Relations, May 21, 2013, accessed April 28, 2015, http://www.cfr.org/arctic/us-coast-guard-arctic-strategy/p30760; USCG Arctic Strategy, 2.
[171] Sydney J. Freedeberg JR., "Coast Guard To Navy: Arctic's Covered: White House OKs Arctic Icebreaker," Breaking Defense, May, 21, 2013, accessed April 30, 2015, http://breakingdefense.com/2013/05/coast-guard-to-navy-weve-got-arctic-covered-sort-of-white-house-oks-arctic-icebreaker-studies/.
[172] Freedeberg, "Coast Guard To Navy: Arctic's Covered."
[173] "Map: Maritime Crossroads," US Navy, Department of the Navy, accessed April 30, http://www.navy.mil/cno/130515_CNO_Map.pdf.

The USCG document also outlines three strategic objectives in the Arctic for the next decade the Coast Guard would like to achieve – improving awareness of maritime activity, modernizing governance, and broadening partnerships.[174] Furthermore, they make many references to the Bering Strait and its surrounding throughout the document, marking it as a crucial area for the United States and other countries in the near future. They recognize its geopolitical importance when stating that "as the only route between the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, the Bering Strait portends significant strategic importance in the future."[175] When outlining its document on the Arctic, the USCG can rely on data and information gathered by its units operating in the Bering Strait and in the Arctic. Therefore, they can see and assess problems afflicting the region concerning the maritime vessel system and infrastructure, and propose improvements in studies and reports. This makes USCG documents on these regions more practically-oriented.

Despite recognizing its significance for future ventures, increasing transportation and drilling possibilities, the USCG Strategy criticizes the lack of infrastructure and rescue operations, which make the area vulnerable. Therefore, they proposed a Bering Strait Port Access Route Study (PARS) hoping it could provide recommendations for the management of the Strait and safe navigation as vessel activity is increasing in 2010.[176] The first proposal was drafted in 2010 and since then it has been amended a couple of times. Subsequently, a four nautical mile wide two way routing vessel system was developed to better navigate increasing traffic in the BS.[177] The last version was issued in February, 2015 and anyone submit a comment on the proposal until August 2015 as all interested groups have not managed to comment on it yet.[178]

In the United States Navy document *US Navy Arctic Roadmap 2014-2030*, the Bering Strait's strategic importance is also recognized. Moreover, it emphasizes the significance of the corridor for Russia as it is the of the Northern Sea Route and thus it not only links European and Asian markets, but Russian Pacific and Atlantic naval forces too.[179] This is a very important notion regarding the Russian military and American

[174] USCG Arctic Strategy, US Coast Guard, May 2013, 8,10, 20-22.
[175] USCG Arctic Strategy, 13.
[176] USCG, Arctic Strategy, 13.
[177] "USCG proposes shipping route through Bering Strait," World Maritime News, accessed July 25, 2015, http://worldmaritimenews.com/archives/146139/uscg-proposes-shipping-route-through-bering-strait/.
[178] "Port Access Route Study: In the Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait and Bering Sea, Federal Register," accessed July 25, 2015, https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/07/13/2015-16967/port-access-route-study-in-the-chukchi-sea-bering-strait-and-bering-sea.
[179] "The United States Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030," Department of the Navy, February 2014, accessed April 28, 2015, http://www.navy.mil/docs/USN_arctic_roadmap.pdf, 6.

security as the free passage via the Northern Sea Route can speed up the redeployment of Russian army and navy from its European ports to the Far East via the Strait very quickly. It implies that the US Navy is fully aware of the Strait's strategic location and significance for national securities of both states. The document points out that issues afflicting the Strait such as maritime security and safety offer a great space for needed cooperative efforts and joint coordination with Russia in the area.[180] It further outlines likely projection of open-water areas in the Arctic for the period up to 2030, predicting that the Bering Strait will be open for more days every year gradually up to 175 days a year by the end of 2020s.[181] This will lead to longer period of the Arctic Sea routes' open seasons which is important for shipping, fishing, drilling and research activities in the region.[182] Therefore, the US Navy believes that it should turn attention to the area more, as it will be exposed to various influences and demanding interests which will likely collide there. On that account, the national security has to be ensured:

> The geostrategic importance of the Bering Strait will increase as resource extraction, shipping, fishing, and tourism increases. The Navy will be forward deployed and prepared to protect United States' maritime access and interests as the Arctic Ocean sea lanes begin to open.[183]

However, in March 2015, the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard released a new strategy entitled *A Cooperative Strategy for the 21st Century: Forward, Engaged, Ready*. The new collaborative document was issued eight years after the last one was released in 2007. It takes into account global geopolitical and military changes, new global security threats and provides a new strategic guidance for years to come. As the demand for energy resources soars, the document emphasizes the pivotal role of maritime crossroads. It mentions all major strategic chokepoints, from Panama and Suez Canal to Straits of Malacca and Hormuz, nevertheless it absolutely fails to recognize the geostrategic importance of Arctic straits.[184] Yet, the document acknowledges the rising

[180] "The United States Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030," 6.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 11-12.
[183] Ibid.,17.
[184] "Cooperative Strategy for the 21st Century: Forward, Engaged, Ready," US Navy, March 2015, accessed May, 3, 2015, http://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/150227-CS21R-Final.pdf, 5-6.

strategic importance of the Arctic region due to changing climate conditions and encourages a greater Navy's involvement in the area, especially the Coast Guard units.

It was the Department of Defense (DOD) which was among the first federal agencies or departments to point out the Bering Strait's strategic location and encouraged the US to engage more in the region. In the *Report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage* issued in May 2011 it stated:

> An increase in maritime traffic between Asia and Europe, or Russia, could also raise the prominence of the Bering Strait as a strategic chokepoint and heighten the geostrategic importance of the Arctic region. The U.S. national security community will need to monitor the region closely, and be prepared to revisit assessments as conditions change.[185]

This is a clear message concerning the Bering Strait by the Defense Department. It proves willingness of the DOD to keep a close eye on anything that might affect or happen in the region. It demonstrates the US intention to get involved in the area which is crucial to US national interests and stay there. Furthermore, the report acknowledged that there is no current security threat in the region, yet it recommends to manage any discrepancies or disagreements bilaterally or within a framework of a cooperative institution to prevent any future disputes between involved parties as competing political or economic issues may arise.[186] The document further examined US strategic interests and national security objectives the US faces in the Arctic recommending to build a deep-water ports and new icebreakers.[187]

The DOD's *Report to the Congress* is in a sharp contrast to the *Arctic Strategy* released by the Defense Department in November 2013. Unlike the *USCG Strategy* and its own *Report to the Congress* which consider the Arctic a dynamic region prone to various radical changes, the DOD has rather indifferent and vague approach towards the Arctic governance and geostrategic importance in its 2013 *Arctic Strategy* as it does not regard it a highly important security issue. Moreover, the document does not mention the Bering Strait and its geostrategic significance at all contrary to the *Report to the Congress.* This is probably due to the Department's belief that the region is more a maritime governance

[185] "Report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage," Department of Defense, May 2011, accessed May, 3, 2015, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Tab_A_Arctic_Report_Public.pdf., 13.
[186] "Report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage," 13.

issue not a national defense matter as conflict is rather unlikely to erupt there so far, therefore

In January 2015, four months before the US have taken over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council, President Barack Obama issued an executive order *Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts in the Arctic* to better coordinate the federal policy towards US Arctic areas in the upcoming years.[188] As the United States was preparing for the chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2014, a new position of the US Arctic "ambassador" was created as the geostrategic significance of the High-North is growing. As the US special representative for the Arctic, the Obama Administration appointed former US Coast Guard Commandant Robert Papp.[189] This is a very significant move which further marks the shift to the more progressive US Arctic policy as Papp is one of the few persons in the American politics who has been pointing out the strategic importance of the Bering Strait. Moreover, he was actively involved in the BSR and has become an expert on Arctic issues and changes. In the order, Obama Administration recognized climate change and its consequences in the Arctic as the top priority of the US Arctic national agenda and emphasized the need to adverse its effects in cooperation with other nations and organizations:

> As a global leader, the United States has the responsibility to strengthen international cooperation to mitigate the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change, understand more fully and manage more effectively the adverse effects of climate change, protect life and property, develop and manage resources responsibly, enhance the quality of life of Arctic inhabitants, and serve as stewards for valuable and vulnerable ecosystems.[190]

To better coordinate their efforts, an Arctic Executive Steering Committee was established. Its main task is to "provide guidance to executive departments and agencies and enhance coordination of Federal Arctic policies across agencies and offices, and, where applicable, with State, local, and Alaska Native tribal governments and similar Alaska Native organizations, academic and research institutions, and the private and

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[187] Conley, "The New Foreign Policy Frontier: U.S Interests," 31, 7-8.
[188] "Executive order Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts in the Arctic," White House, accessed April 28, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/21/executive-order-enhancing-coordination-national-efforts-arctic.
[189] http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/07/229317.htm.

nonprofit sectors."[191] A huge improvement is the Committee's change in organization as it was created as a senior-level group. Unlike previous Arctic policy groups, committees and meetings where the deputy assistant secretaries and senior directors were in charge, now the deputy secretaries are responsible for preparing the Arctic policy.[192] The coordination of the committee is also improved as the number of departments and agencies served by the committee was reduced by almost half, from 39 to 21.[193] These are big steps forward as policies and decisions can be carried out more effectively and in a more coordinated way. The Committee's main task at the beginning is the prioritization of Arctic issues. Tough decisions have to be made which priorities the Committee should concentrate on and provide them governmental funding. Even more pressing is the need to resource these priorities well as "the question of identifying new resources to implement U.S. Arctic policies is an even greater White House challenge, which has been conspicuously missing in nearly all U.S. government strategies related to the Arctic."[194] The second major task the Committee has to deal with regards different approaches on the future of the US Arctic between Alaska and Washington. They should try to balance their differences, to find out common goals and integrate them in what should become unified US Arctic policy.[195] By establishing the committee, the Administration shows that it does not fall behind other Arctic players anymore, on contrary, that it wants to assert a leading role in dealing with the impacts of climate change in the region. By bringing the Arctic agenda to the front line, it makes it one of the federal priorities in its national agenda. The Committee creates a shielding framework for all American entities dealing with Arctic issues ranging from national to local levels and from scientific institutions, NGOs to local communities which are committed to bring order and prioritization to the Arctic.

Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski praises the national initiative, however, she fears that the order focuses too much on climate and very little on the economic development, industrial opportunities, infrastructure build-up and issues concerning native people of Alaska.[196] According to her, the Administration's agenda in the Arctic does not want to

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[190] "Executive order Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts in the Arctic."
[191] "Executive order Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts in the Arctic."
[192] Heather A. Conley, "What to Know about the New White House Executive Order on Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts in the Arctic," Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 22, 2015, accessed July 31, 2015, http://csis.org/publication/what-know-about-new-white-house-executive-order-enhancing-coordination-national-efforts-.
[193] Conley, "What to Know about the New White House Executive Order."
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Yereth Rosen, "Obama issues executive order to better coordinate Arctic,"

deal with any difficult or demanding tasks but is a rather soft-power policy based on discussions and rhetoric.[197] Murkowski's statement is in compliance with the Alaska state's Arctic policy which endorses proactive economic development. On the other hand, Washington focuses more on climate-related and environmental approach. As the differences increases between Juneau and Washington increases, they should try to overcome their discrepancies, find a common ground by balancing environmental protection and development of the State.[198] Yet it is not clear where the balance should lie. Therefore, Murkowski and Senator Angus King created US Senate Arctic Caucus in March 2015, an effort to promote Arctic issues and to build US leadership in the Arctic.[199] They aim to promote the issue in the Congress and bring the Arctic agenda to the frontline of the national policy as the US is holding the chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

To conclude, since 2009 the United States has made a significant progress in its official policy and stance towards the Arctic and the Bering Strait. Especially since President Obama's second term when the essential national strategies regarding the Polar regions were released. The US emphasizes international cooperation, cooperative efforts of Arctic states through the Arctic Council and sustainable development of oil and gas resources. As the US acquired the chairmanship of the Arctic Council in the spring of 2015, the message is clear. The United States intends to play an active role in regard to Arctic issues which is a huge shift from the Arctic position the US held until recently.

One of the very few programs initiated on the highest level and subsequently being conducted jointly through National Park Service under the US Department of the Interior in cooperation with their Russian counterparts, local communities and researchers is *Shared Beringian Heritage Program.* This unique program was established in 1991 to serve as a platform for future transboundary national park covering both sides of the Bering Strait.[200] During the next two decades, the program fostered regional cooperation, funded local and scientific projects on environmental, indigenous, historical and cultural issues, and tried to foster the idea of the international park.

Barents Observer, January 28, 2015, (accessed May 10, 2015), http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2015/01/obama-issues-executive-order-better-coordinate-arctic-28-01.

[197] Rosen, "Obama issues executive order to better coordinate Arctic,"

[198] Conley, "What to Know about the New White House Executive Order."

[199] "King, Murkowski Announce U.S. Senate Arctic Caucus," United States Senate, accessed July 31, 2015, http://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/king-murkowski-announce-us-senate-arctic-caucus.

[200] "History of the Program," Shared Beringian Heritage Program, accessed May, 2, 2015, http://www.nps.gov/akso/beringia/about/programhistory.cfm.

Plans to establish an internationally protected area in the Bering Strait region took a new direction after Barack Obama was elected the US President in 2008. Back in 2009, it seemed that then Presidents Obama and Mevedev strived for relations that would be free of "Cold War mentalities and chart a fresh start in relations between our two countries."[201] In order to put past animosities behind and "reset" American-Russian relations they established a Bilateral Presidential Commission that aimed to improve rather cold relations. It was supposed to tackle many fields ranging from joint military operations, nuclear energy security, environment, counterterrorism, arms control and other bilateral issues by creating working groups set up by officials and experts from both countries.[202]

Especially on the level conducted by US Secretary of State and Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs tangible steps regarding the trans-boundary park took shape. On September 8, 2012, at the APEC meeting in Vladivostok US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Russian counterpart, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov issued a joint statement regarding cooperation in Beringia.[203] According to the statement the transnational park would interconnect the Beringia National Park on the Russian Side and with the Bering Land Bridge Natural Preserve and Cape Crusenstern National Monument in Alaska. The vast protected area would cover 3.2 million acre of the region which is set aside and protected by respective states as natural reserves and a national park.[204] The aim of the American-Russian transboundary agreement is to enhance cooperation in the field of environmental protection, promotion of conservation of the fragile landscape and ecosystem, scientific research and to preserve the cultural heritage, languages and lifestyles of indigenous communities residing on both sides of the Strait.[205]

A huge emphasis is put on native peoples and joint cooperation with them as both countries seem to recognize them as a third party in the issue. The statement proclaims that:

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[201] Joint Statement by President Dmitriy Medvedev of the Russian Federation and President Barack Obama of the United States of America, White House, April 2009, accessed April 30, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-Statement-by-President-Dmitriy-Medvedev-of-the-Russian-Federation-and-President-Barack-Obama-of-the-United-States-of-America.

[202] Joint Statement

[203] Stephen Kaufmann, "U.S., Russia To Conserve Beringia's Heritage," Mission of the United States to Geneva. (accessed November 30, 2014), http://geneva.usmission.gov/2012/09/11/u-s-russia-to-conserve-beringia%E2%80%99s-heritage.

[204] Kaufmann, "U.S., Russia To Conserve Beringia's Heritage."

Both the United States and Russia seek to deepen cooperation and strengthen ties in the region of their common boundary in the Bering Strait. In that regard, both sides recognize the need to protect the rights of indigenous peoples residing in Alaska and Chukotka, and to ensure that residents and indigenous peoples engaged in cultural and traditional activities aimed at providing for their personal needs have continued access to natural resources in accordance with each nation's laws.[206]

It demonstrates that the proposed park would not only concentrate on the protection of the unique environment but it would also thrives to protect and help to sustain the traditional life and culture of its native peoples.

The Russian Park, The Beringia National Park in Chukotka was finally established on January, 17, 2013 by a decree signed by Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev implemented within the Concept of development of specially protected natural territories of federal significance for the period up to 2020.[207] The decree transferred the jurisdiction and administration under the auspices of Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation.[208] Following the creation of an officially protected area on the Russian side, the draft of "MEMORANDUM of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation Symbolically Linking National Parks in the Bering Strait Region" was released on October 23, 2013.[209] Being just a step from declaring the draft an official agreement and thus linking two national protected areas into one trans-boundary protected park, it could have a been a very significant achievement in American-Russian relations. However, once the conflict in Ukraine began all negotiations on this agreement were put to hold. Government to government discussions and activities have been suspended and the National Park

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[205] "U.S.-Russia Statement on Cooperation in Bering Strait Region," IIP Digital, United States of America Embassy, (accessed November 30, 2014), http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/09/20120908135691.html#axzz3LEvRWVW2

[206] "U.S.-Russia Statement on Cooperation in Bering Strait Region."

[207] Справка к постановлению об учреждении национального парка «Берингия», Правительство России, http://web.archive.org/web/20130402154841/http://government.ru/gov/results/22422/ (accessed November 30, 2014)

[208] Справка к постановлению об учреждении национального парка «Берингия».

[209] "MEMORANDUM of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation Symbolically Linking National Parks in the Bering Strait Region" Draft of October 23, 2015, Alaska State Legislature, accessed March 28, 2015, http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_documents.asp?session=28&docid=18090.

Service through Shared Beringian Heritoge Program is not collaborating with the Beringia National Park staff at this point.[210]

Although recognizing Bering Strait region's strategic potential in terms of its environmental and cultural protection rather recently, the United States have initiated or been part of several important and key agreements and projects in the region. One of the first internationally cooperated efforts in the region dates back to 1911 when four major states of the North Pacific Area - United States, Russia, Japan and Canada (Great Britain) .adopted the "North Pacific Sealing Convention" aiming at reviving the northern seal population on a few islands in the Bering Sea under the joint management. The established regime was credited as a successful tool in preventing a regional conflict to occur and was especially unique as the first international attempt to protect wildlife against interests of individual states.[211]

In 1994 Russia and the US, together with four actors outside the region China, Poland, Korea and Japan agreed to conserve the stock of pollock – the most important fish of the region- in the Central Bering Sea when signing the "Convention on the Conservation and Management of the Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea".[212]

To better manage pollution problems and oil spills threating the region, the US and Russia adopted the "Agreement between Government of the Russian Federation and United States of America on Cooperation in Combating Pollution in the Bering and Chukchi Seas in Emergency Situations" in 2001.[213]

The professor of international law and Commander James Kraska even claims that the US-Russian cooperation in the Bering Strait region is one of the best functioning between both states. Especially, he highlights day-to-day activities and operations done by the 17th Coast Guard district and the Federal Border Service of Russia the eastern region.[214] They center on maritime borders and security. Initiated by the "Memorandum on collaborative management of the area" signed in 1995, its scope widened and got more specified after a protocol to the agreement was implemented in 2001. The main aspects of the joint operation is "to more effectively combine maritime law enforcement in the North Pacific,

[210] Janis Kozlowski, e-mail message to author, April 10, 2015.
[211] Oran R. Young, "The Structure of Arctic Cooperation: Solving Problems/Seizing Opportunities," a paper prepared at the request of Finland in preparation for the fourth conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, Rovaniemi, 27-29 August 2000, accessed March 28, 2015, http://www.arcticparl.org/files/static/conf4_sac.pdf, 5.
[212] Young, "The Structure of Arctic Cooperation: Solving Problems/Seizing Opportunities," 6.
[213] AMSA, 108.

including search and rescue operations, protection of 200-mile exclusive economic zones, prevention of terrorism and smuggling at sea and maritime border security."[215]

3.2 Russia

As Russia's vast territory is behind the Arctic Circle, the nation has always looked to its northern frontier with expectations and ambitions. The northern territory spans from Kola Peninsula to the Bering Strait which makes it the country with the longest Arctic coastline. During the Cold War Russian Northern areas and coast were crucial for security reasons as military bases were scattered all over the Russian Arctic and as a place for research on nuclear weapons. However, as in the other parts of the Arctic, its military strategic significance waned in the nineties.[216] With the warming Arctic atmosphere its importance started to grow again due to its economic prospects as its vast offshore oil and gas reserves are becoming more accessible and the Northern Sea Route can save a significant amount of money, time and fuel.[217] The economic development and energy security is the top priority for Russia in its policy towards the Arctic as its sees it as a crucial factor for Russia's future economic growth and securing national interests.[218] In the opening of the High North, Russia sees a new possibilities for reviving its world-power status and aims to regain its position among world countries.

In *Russian Federation's Policy for the Arctic to 2020* which was adopted in by the Russian Duma in 2008 and approved by the Russia's President Vladimir Putin in May 2009.[219] Four years earlier than the US issued its National Arctic Strategy, it proves that the Arctic holds a prominent role for Russia, a special place where they can exert power freely. Apart from seeing the Arctic as a source of natural resources and as a region that will solve Russia's economic and social instability, the Russian Arctic Strategy stresses three more objectives vital for its national interests: to preserve and protect its environment and sensitive ecological areas, to maintain it as a "zone of peace and cooperation" and to use

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[214] James Kraska, "From Pariah to Partner: Russian-American Security Cooperation in the Arctic Ocean," *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law* 16, no. 2 (2010): 532. 517-534.
[215] Kraska, "From Pariah to Partner: Russian-American Security Cooperation," 532-33.
[216] Antrim, "THE NEXT GEOGRAPHICAL PIVOT: The Russian Arctic," 21; Dmitry Gorenburg, "How to understand Russia's Arctic strategy," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2014, accessed July 10, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/12/how-to-understand-russias-arctic-strategy/.
[217] Antrim, "THE NEXT GEOGRAPHICAL PIVOT: The Russian Arctic," 18.
[218] Dmitry Gorenburg, "How to understand Russia's Arctic strategy."

the Northern Sea Route as the main channel for the Russian national transportation and communication activities in the Arctic.[220] Furthermore, the document reveals that Russia plans to deploy special military units in the Arctic that would protect its national interests in case of a terrorist attack or illegal immigration, they military units will be essential to show Russia's will to stay a leading Arctic power.[221] That might explain the provocative military exercises on the Russian side of the Bering Strait and fighter jets' flights near the US territory occurring recently. However, rather than a serious threat to US defense it is a demonstrative projection of Russia's power.[222] At the same time, Russia emphasizes need to enhance regional and bilateral cooperation as the Arctic should be preserved as a conflict-free zone.

To conclude, Caitlyn Antrim points out that as a consequence to altered geopolitical conditions in the region, Russia cannot be considered as a land power only anymore, on contrary, other nations should realize it is a new emerging sea power due to the opening of the Northern Sea Route.[223] Despite not mentioning the Bering Strait region explicitly in the document, emphasis put on the national security and on the importance of maritime sea routes clearly encompasses the natural passage as it is the only exit from the Arctic to the Northern Pacific area. Therefore, for Russia, the Bering Strait is of crucial importance as well. On one hand, Russia aims at securing its own national security, but as a part of global trade network and international institutions, Russia seeks to balance its ambitions and region's challenges.

In *Russian Federation's Policy for the Arctic to 2020* which was adopted in by the Russian Duma in 2008 and approved by the Russia's President Vladimir Putin in May 2009.[224] Four years earlier than the US issued its National Arctic Strategy, it proves that Arctic holds a prominent role for Russia once again. Russia realizes its vast potential for its national security and economic growth as it could rebuild its strength and shattered world position due to recent events in Eastern Europe. The Russian Arctic Strategy. Despite not

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[219] "Arctic Strategy Documents," Geopolitics in the High North, accessed July 10, 2015, http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&limitstart=2.

[220] "Russian Federation's Policy for the Arctic to 2020," ARCTIS: Arctic Resources and Transportation Information System, accessed July 10, 2015, http://www.arctissearch.com/Russian+Federation+Policy+for+the+Arctic+to+2020.

[221] "Arctic Strategy Documents," Geopolitics in the High North.

[222] W. J. Hennigan,"Intent of Russian military aircraft near U.S. shores remains unclear,"Los Angeles Times, April 6, 2015, accessed July 10, 2015http://www.adn.com/article/20150406/intent-russian-military-aircraft-near-us-shores-remains-unclear.

[223] Antrim, "THE NEXT GEOGRAPHICAL PIVOT," 3.

[224] "Arctic Strategy Documents," Geopolitics in the High North, accessed July 10, 2015, http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&limitstart=2.

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3.3 Canada

Despite disagreeing on several key Arctic issues, such as whether the Northwest Passage is an international strait or Canada's domestic waters, and having an unresolved maritime border dispute in the Beaufort Sea, the United States is a "premier partner" to Canada in the Arctic.[225] The have been engaged together on scientific and In the summer of 2013 US and Canada's Coast Guard conducted their first oil spill exercise in the offshore Arctic.[226] The drill occurred in the Bering Strait by intent, as the maritime traffic has been steadily increasing there and a rising number of fuel carriers pass the Strait every year exposing it to oil spill risks. The exercise was held in the proximity of Port Clarence which has been designated as a port for vessels and ships in emergency and proved successful despite the bad weather.[227]

Canada has more than 40% of its landmass above the Arctic Circle makes it together with Russia two largest Arctic states as it comes to their polar territories.[228] Alongside its coastline the Northwest Passage, the other major shipping line after the NSR benefits Canada does not borders the Bering Strait directly, however, as in the case of the NSR, the Northwest Passage exits/enters the Arctic via the Bering Strait, and therefore all the current and potential trans-Arctic traffic sailing the Northwest Passage would have to transit via the Bering Strait. Therefore, its status of an international strait is crucial for Canada too as it wants to ensure safe and secure transit though this transport junction. However, also

[225] "Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy," Council on Foreign Relations, June 3, 2013, accessed May 5, 2015, http://www.cfr.org/arctic/statement-canadas-arctic-foreign-policy/p32089.

[226] Tim Bradner, "U.S., Canada conduct Bering Strait spill drill," Alaska Journal of Commerce, July 4, 2015, 2013, accessed May 5, http://www.alaskajournal.com/Alaska-Journal-of-Commerce/July-Issue-4-2013/US-Canada-conduct-Bering-Strait-spill-drill/

[227] Bradner, "U.S., Canada conduct Bering Strait spill drill."

[228] "The Canadian Arctic," Government of Canada, accessed July 12, 2015, http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/united_kingdom-royaume_uni/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/arctic-arctique.aspx?lang=eng&view=d.t.

Canada does not mention or comment on the BS in its documents and national strategies on Canada's Arctic Policy.[229]

The documents emphasize the significance of the Arctic to Canada stressing its crucial importance to Canadian sovereignty. Other major themes regarding the Arctic are its economic value and its symbolic significance for Canadian national identity. Although putting stress on development, and need to do a research in the Arctic, it is strengthening of sovereignty, defense, security and international cooperation what is the most highlighted.[230]

3.4 Asian countries

Non-Arctic countries realize the potential of opening of the Arctic and have started looking north as alternate shipping routes become more viable. Especially, the Asian countries are interested in the region as it opens new market rich on natural resources as oil and gas are in high demand in many of these nations. Moreover, the NSR offers an attractive new shipping possibility for the markets in the Far East compared to routes crossing Straits of Malacca and Hormuz and the Suez Canal as costs can be saved significantly.[231] They are interested in such a management system of the Bering Strait that would ensure safe passage of vessels through the Bering Strait, therefore they endorse activities such as *Polar Code* initiated by IMO or are in favor of *Bering Strait Port Access Study* proposed by the US Coast Guard.

China, as the Asian leading power have proved that it is serious about the North over the course of last 10 years. By 2016, China hopes to have the same number of icebreakers as Norway and US have, it spends over 60 mil. USD a year on the Arctic research and even

[229] "Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy," Government of Canada,accessed July 12, 2015, http://www.iarc.uaf.edu/sites/default/files/node/4484/canada_statement_on_canada_s_arctic_foreign_poli_16309.pdf.

[230] Klaus Dodds, "We are a northern country: Stephen Harper and the Canadian Arctic," *Polar Record* 46 (2010): 1-2

[231] "Interests and Roles on non-Arctic States in the Arctic," Background Brief published by Munk School of Global Affairs, October 2011, accessed July 12, 2015, 4-6, http://www.iarc.uaf.edu/sites/default/files/node/4484/interests_and_roles_on_non_arctic_states_in_the_ar_13966.pdf .

established the Arctic Administration. By 2020, China plans that 15% of its international vessels will go through the Arctic Sea Routes.[232]

Apart from China Singapore, South Korea and Japan belong to Asia states which want to take part in the Arctic development, especially the shipping possibilities hold a potential for them because of global trade.[233] Especially, Japan is aware of its proximity to the Bering Strait, recognizing the potential of becoming a hub country for ships passing via the corridor. Although praising the savings in distance and time and acknowledging lesser security risks the higher costs counterweighs it as Russia's transit visas and need to use icebreakers together with notification of Russian officials three month before the planned journey.[234] Moreover, it does not believe the Northern Sea Route will become viable for cargo ships in a near future. Despite that, Japan has appointed an Ambassador to Arctic as Singapore has which makes them two only countries in Asia having a special official for the Arctic issues.[235]

3.5 Arctic Council

The Bering Strait lies within the Arctic governance system whose established regime apply for the Bering Strait as well. International cooperation got a clear institutional framework when the Arctic Council, which acts as a main regional body, was established in 1996 and Arctic Five countries started to meet every two years at ministerial summits.[236] The Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum which strives to enhance cooperation and coordination and thus attempts to prevent conflicts to occur in the territory.

Its primary aim is to promote sustainable development and environmental protection of the Arctic in cooperation with its eight founding members[237] and Arctic Indigenous communities, whose representing organizations were granted the Permanent Participants

[232] Andreas Kuersten, "Russian Sanctions, China, and the Arctic," *Diplomat,* January 3, 2015, accessed July 12, 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/russian-sanctions-china-and-the-arctic/.
[233] Katherine Cima and Russell Sticklor, "Japan, Korea, Singapore and the Arctic Sea Lanes," *Diplomat* March 24, 2014, accessed July 12, 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/japan-korea-singapore-and-the-arctic-sea-lanes/.
[234] Jasmin Sinclair, "Japan and the Arctic: not so Poles apart," International Arctic Research Center, accessed July 12, 2015, 43-44, http://www.iarc.uaf.edu/sites/default/files/node/4484/japan_and_the_arctic_not_so_poles_apart_sincla_96785.pdfm.
[235] Sinclair, "Japan and the Arctic: not so Poles apart," 45.
[236] Dag Harald Claes, **"**The New Geopolitics of the High North,**"** 3.
[237] All of eight Arctic States as defined by the Arctic Circle crossing their territories: Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finnland, Russia, United States, Canada and Denmark (Greenland and Faroe Islands included).

Status.[238] Although they do not have a decision-making power which is endowed only to full members, they can contribute to and play an active role in negotiations, raise comments to any decisions made and "have full consultation rights." They comprise a unique part of the forum unlike other international forums, where native peoples are not represented at all or they play only a marginal role.[239] Among the indigenous organizations that have a say word in matters regarding the Bering Strait and its surroundings belong Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).[240] The Council has also granted the observer status to series of non-governmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, and also to twelve non-Arctic states.

Due to rapid changing conditions in the Arctic that will likely have consequences on the whole world, it is no wonder that other countries are willing not be left out as they are, yet indirectly, affected by these changes as well.[241] Concerning the Bering Strait region, it should be noted that all Asian major economic powers in the Far East, Japan, South Korea and People's Republic of China have become observers in the Arctic Council as the Bering Strait would be of a pivotal importance in the future when northern sea lanes become viable.[242]

The Arctic Council remains "just" a forum and as an institution no possibility to adopt legally-binding decisions. On the other hand, it serves its purpose as a high-level forum well for its members make use of it as an arena to negotiate international and also bilateral intergovernmental agreements.[243] However, under the auspices of the Arctic Council two legal agreements – the 2011 *Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic* and the 2013 *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic* – were concluded becoming its first binding treaties.[244] This marks a big step as both agreements apply on the Bering Strait region where are heavily needed.

The United States assumed the two-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council on April 24, 2015. Unlike its predecessor, Canada who focused on the economic development and

[238] "About the Arctic Council," Arctic Council, accessed May 2, 2015, http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/about-arctic-council.
[239] "Permanent Participants," Arctic Council, accessed May 2, 2015, http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/permanent-participant.
[240] "Permanent Participants," Arctic Council.
[241] "Observers," Arctic Council, accessed May 2, 2015, http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/observers.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Kathrin Keil ,"A new model for international cooperation," Arctic Institute, February 20, 2014, accessed May 2, 2015, http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/2014/02/a-new-model-for-international.html.

established the Arctic Economic Council during its chairmanship, the US led by State Secretary John Kerry will concentrate on climate change and enhancement of Arctic indigenous communities' living conditions.[245]

[244] Ibid.
[245] Carey Restino, "U.S. chairmanship of Arctic Council presents challenges," Alaska Dispatch, April 26, 2015, accessed May 2, 2015, http://www.adn.com/article/20150426/us-chairmanship-arctic-council-presents-challenges.

Conclusion

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the long established geopolitical realities and the world order based on the US-USSR rivalry ceased to exist. The last decade of the twentieth century saw an emergence of new powers and global centers as well as rise of regions holding a strategic place in a newly organized world. Nations as well as non-state actors started to become more and more integrated in the global trade network. World economy proved to be the main force driving world, and national policies and relations as it replaced military issues. As the number of players increased on the global stage, the interactions among these actors started to take place at various levels more often. As a consequence, new geopolitical concept based on international and local cooperation, globalization and region-building rather than rivalry emerged. However, pursuing national interests has remained strong with states being the leading force driving integration.

At the same time, climate change consequences started to be self-evident, especially in the Polar Regions. As the Arctic is heating up twice as fast as the rest of the world, the opening of the Arctic, caused by the ice reduction will have a tremendous impact on the region as new shipping routes are becoming more viable and natural resources more accessible. As a consequence, these realities together with steadily increasing marine vessel traffic passing via the Bering Strait proves, that the geopolitically significance of the BS region is rising being it the only watery passage between the fast-growing Asia-Pacific and the Arctic. However, opening of the Arctic can affect the region negatively, too.

Apart from changing the regional ecosystem by altering its natural conditions and physical characteristics as coastline erosions have demonstrated, increasing traffic activities and mineral resources development could also have negative impact on the region's fragile environment as it belongs to major Arctic biological and ecologically sensitive hotspots. Moreover, the increased vessel activity might also endanger local indigenous communities and disrupt their subsistence economies as the maritime infrastructure is insufficient with very few navigational aids being deployed in the area, and as mandatory vessel traffic monitoring and information systems are still missing so far.

However, as both the Arctic states and other nations are interested in the region, the new agreements and rulings regarding the region's safety are slowly being adopted. At the same time, cooperative efforts and proposals for new vessel systems and maritime

governance are also in progress, as the adoption of *Polar Code* initiated by IMO or *Bering Strait Port Access Study* proposed by the US Coast Guard. As more actors and states become involved in the area being attracted by its economic prospects, the regional states aim at securing their own national security as human and traffic activity is likely to increase.

The Alaska Purchase proved to be one of the most important ventures in the US history as it gained the US an access to the important geostrategic region between Canada and Russia, the Arctic and the Asia-Pacific making it a crossroads of various demands. The Cold war proved its strategic importance militarily. The Bering Strait region is an integral part of Alaska, the American Arctic and therefore also part of the United States. The American national policy towards the BS has to be understood within the US Arctic policy. The Obama Administration has started to pursue a more coherent US Arctic Policy as the nation realizes does not want to stay behind other regional players. The US wants to become an active player in the Arctic arena as it clearly demonstrates in their strategies, policy frameworks and recommendations on the High North. According to its policy frameworks and documents, the US focuses more on the Arctic recognizing its importance for their national interests – energy, environmental, economic and national security. Recently launched governmental initiatives and programs such as Congressional Arctic Caucus, Arctic Executive Steering Committee or the US chairmanship of the Arctic Council show American strong commitment to the issues facing the Polar Regions and will to participate in region's governance and environmental protection.

However, the Bering Strait region itself has been rather omitted from its governmental documents and reports or has been just briefly addressed. Save for a few exceptions made by individuals and several governmental agencies and departments the US does not seem to fully understand the strategic significance, the Bering Strait poses. A clear national strategy concerning the Bering Strait region as a crucial place of vital importance for national security and economic interests is missing so far as it wants to build its leadership in the North. As cooperation with other nations is one of the main objectives of the US National Arctic strategy, it should seek to work with others through a combined effort to respond to region's problems.

Whether executed multilaterally, bilaterally or within the framework of an international institution, a plan is painfully needed to handle and balance all the pressing problems and challenges the region is facing – ranging from environmental changes threatening to transform the region irretrievably, commercial development, local

indigenous interests and inadequate navigational and transportation infrastructure, maritime traffic management, incident response capabilities and oil spills prevention measures. Most importantly, a balance has to be found between different interests, especially between environmental protection on one side and commercial development with marine traffic on the other. However, to find out where the balance should lie will be a challenging task. Mere mentioning and proclamations are not enough if the United States wants to become a fully-fledged and respected member of the Arctic Five "team," and to acquire a leading role in the region. Apart from local activities, scientific research and a few federal cooperative efforts done within the international institutional framework or bilaterally as is the case of the trans-boundary park in Beringia or US Coast Guard's *Bering Strait Port Access Study*, there are no other specific governmental initiatives regarding the Bering Strait increasing importance in international shipping.

Triggered by climate change, the geopolitical significance of the Bering Strait region is rising as various players draw their attention to the region due to its economic opportunities. It is slowly becoming an important transportation junction with an immense potential for upcoming decades. If the warming trend continues, the Bering Strait can become another crucial chokepoint in the system of world strategic maritime passages and might even surpass some of them in numbers of passing cargo ships later in the twenty first century.

Souhrn

S koncem studené války a rozpadem Sovětského svazu, geopolitické rozdělení světa založené na sovětsko-americkém soupeření přestalo existovat. Poslední desetiletí dvacátého století se tak stalo svědkem vzniku nových mocností a globalních center stejně jako vzestupu nových strategicky významných regionů. Státy a nestátní aktéří se začaly stále více integrovat do globální ekonomické sítě, která se úkazala být zásadní hnací silou světové politiky. Jak počet nových hráčů na světové scéně rostl, interakce mezi nimi začaly probíhat na různých úrovních častěji. Důsledkem byl vznik nového geopolitického konceptu, který byl založen na mezinárodní a regionální spolupráci, globalizaci a budování regionů spíše než na vzájemném soupeření. Státy však zůstaly hlavními iniciátory a hybateli té integrace. Sledování národních zájmů a proszaování vlastních myšlenek tak zůstalo nadále důležitou součástí, která tak pararalelně zůstala vedle nového konceptu.

Oblast Arktidy pozbyla s koncem studené války svůj význam jako důležitý vojenský geostrategický region. Avšak změna klimatu přinášející globální oteplování se ukázala být důležitým geopolitckým faktorem, který z Arktidy opět udělal počátkem dvacátého prvního století dynamickou oblast strategického významu zejména z ekonomického hlediska. To, že se Arktida otepluje dvakrát rychleji než zbytek světa, se projevuje zejména táním mořského ledu. Tím se otevírají nové trans-arktické námořní trasy a možnosti těžby nerostných surovin nacházejících se v kontinentálním šelfu. To bude mít stále více rostoucí dopad na oblast Beringovy úžiny, která je jedinou spojnicí mezi asijsko-pacifickým regionem a Arktidou. Jak bude do oblasti vstupovat více aktérů a dopravní aktivita bude narůstat, může postupně docházet ke srážkám plavidel, jejich ztroskotání kvůli silnému proudu a větrům, kolizím lodí s mořskými živočichy využívající úžinu jako migrační koridor či ekologickým katastrofám v podobě ropných skvrn. To může mít negativní dopady na zdejší unikátní prostředí a místní původní obyvatele závislé na zdejším ekosystému a zejména na lovu kytovců a dalších mořských živočichů. Tím může být narušena křehká stabilita regionu včetně, protože zde zatím chybí adekvátní navigační systém, záchranné body či dostatečně vybavené přístavy pro nákladní lodě.

To činí oblast atraktivní nejen pro státy v regionu, ale i ostatní země, které chtějí také využít jejího ekonomického potenciálu. Zejména asijské státy, které lakájí zdejší nerostné suroviny a námořní trasy, které výrazně zkrátí cestu do Evropy či na východní pobřeží Ameriky. Spojené státy reflektují tuto situaci tím, že začaly věnovat danému regionu větší pozornost v rámci své vládní arktické politiky. V rámci Obamovy

administrativy se zásadně proměnil přístup USA k arktickému regionu. Postupně si začaly uvědomovat, že pokud nechtějí zůstat pozadu za ostatními regionálními mocnostmi, musí se začít aktivně zapojovat do dění v oblasti. Na arktickou oblast je tedy dáván stále větší důraz a je považována za jednu z národních priorit co se týče energetické, environmentální, ekonomické a národní bezpečnosti. V posledním roce byl ustanoven např. Senátní výbor pro Arktidu, Výkonná řídící komise pro Arktidu a v dubnu roku 2015 začalo dvouleté předsednictví Spojených států Arktické radě. Komise pro Arktidu má ambiciózní plán prioritizovat zájmy USA v Arktidě a zjednodušit byrokratický systém jednotlivých zasedání, aby v budoucnu byla vládní politika k oblasti lépe koordinovatelná. To dokazuje proaktivní přístup vládní politiky k oblasti, teprve čas však ukáže, kolik ze svých plánů toho USA dokáží v oblasti prosadit.

Co se týče přímo oblasti Beringovy úžiny, americké vládní dokumenty, agentury, reporty a ministerstva zabývající se Arktidou zmiňují její strategickou polohu a upozorňují na její rostoucí význam. Např. Pobřežní stráž Spojených států amerických se oblasti Beringovy úžiny věnuje intenzivněji, protože její jednotky v oblasti často operují. Právě Pobřežní stráž USA pracuje na vytvoření obousměrného dopravního systému, který by korigoval a spravoval rostoucí lodní dopravu v tomto koridoru. Jedná se ale spíše o výjimku, až na pár vládních nařízení, bilaterálních smluv ohledně ochrany zdejšího ekosystému či spolupráce v rámci mezinárodních organizací a lokálních iniciativ neexistuje konkrétní oficiální vládní strategie čistě jen pro oblast Beringovy úžiny.

Díky oteplování Arktidy, již strategický význam Beringovy úžiny roste a bude růst i nádale, avšak bude ještě několik desetiletí trvat než dosáhne svého plného rozsahu. Pokud bude trend oteplování pokračovat jako dosud, může se Beringova úžina stát v budoucnu zásadním dopravním koridorem jako např. Suezský průplav či Hormuzská úžina či je dokonce předčít.

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